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**ENCOUNTERS AND
DIVERSIONS**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

LUCK OF THE YEAR
LOITERER'S HARVEST
GIVING AND RECEIVING
ONE DAY AND ANOTHER
FIRESIDE AND SUNSHINE
OLD LAMPS FOR NEW
THE FRIENDLY TOWN
THE GENTLEST ART
GENEVRA'S MONEY
THE SECOND POST
A ROVER I WOULD BE
ROSE AND ROSE
LISTENER'S LURE
MR. INGLESIDE
LONDON LAVENDER
OVER BEMERTON'S
A FRONDED ISLE
EVENTS AND EMBROIDERIES
CHARACTER AND COMEDY
GOOD COMPANY
HER INFINITE VARIETY

ENCOUNTERS AND DIVERSIONS

BY

E. V. LUCAS

"I beg your pardon again when I disturbed you, but I hope not in vain."—*Letter to the Author from a Stranger in Budapest.*



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NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

THROUGH a strange oversight an essay called "Fate Malevolent" was included in the first edition of this book, although it had already appeared in a previous volume of mine. I have now substituted for it the new paper called, "Stop it with Flowers."

E. V. L.

ENCOUNTERS AND DIVERSIONS

The Sweep



IT used to be a favourite device of humorous artists—I think there are several examples in Leech's work—to make drawings of chimney-sweeps in close conjunction with persons of superior cleanliness and fastidious attire. Indeed, it is probably still done, for a belief in reincarnation is tenaciously held among jokes.

But the odd thing is that, though I have seen sweeps all my life—and a very early recollection is of running out into the garden to watch the brush emerge from a chimney—they have either been on foot pushing their barrows, or driving little carts, or about to begin their task in the sheeted room itself. Not till last week did I ever see a sweep sitting in a railway carriage next to a person of superior cleanliness and more or less

Encounters and Diversions

fastidious attire. But I saw it then, and I remember the incident with some clearness, because the person beside him was myself.

He was a sweep of the old school. What the sweeps of the new school are like I have no notion ; but I suppose that they are as revolutionary as their contemporaries in other branches of art. Their rods, I should guess, are no longer straight but resemble corkscrews, their brushes are no longer round, and they probably maintain that soot is white. But my sweep belonged to the past, and in our conversation he lamented the changes that have come upon the world, not so much in the matter of sweeping as in the attitude of people towards those who perform that necessary task.

“ I hope,” he said, “ that whenever you meet a sweep in the street, you throw a kiss to him.”

“ Certainly not,” I replied.

He sighed. “ Just as I expected,” he said. “ And there are very few left that do. But when I began it was still quite a common habit. I walked about having kisses thrown to me on all sides.”

“ But why ? ” I asked.

“ Because it’s lucky,” he said. “ Didn’t you

The Sweep

know that? When you meet a sweep you should always throw him a kiss, and then you have good luck. Don't you want good luck?"

"Want it?" I exclaimed; "want it?"

"Well," he said, "that's a way to get it. But people don't seem to know it any more. I suppose it's because it's only the rules for bad luck that are talked about. Mothers tell their children all about spilling salt, and walking under ladders, and going to sea on Friday, and crossing on the stairs: all the things that bring bad luck; but they don't tell them about the lucky ones. At least, only a few. They tell them about ladybirds or spiders settling on your hand, and about picking up pins, but they don't tell them about chimney-sweeps."

"Do you share in the good luck that you produce?" I asked.

"Not us," he replied.

"But surely that's very unfair," I said. "Surely it's wrong that sweeps should be the means of spreading good fortune, but should have no one themselves to throw kisses to? Isn't there anyone?"

"Not that I've heard of," he said. "No, we just make good luck for others."

The Sweep

“ ‘ Well,’ she said, ‘ I’ve been looking for you ever since. You brought me luck.’ And she gave me a sovereign ; for those were the days when there were sovereigns.

“ ‘ And might I ask,’ I said, ‘ if the luck is in any way connected with this little angel here ? ’ pointing to the baby. And she laughed and said ‘ Yes.’

“ Well,” he went on, “ that’s only one case. I could tell you plenty more. The gents who have backed winners after meeting me and have given me something for myself ! Because there is some gratitude in the world, after all ; or, at any rate, there was. I used to know more than one gent who said that he never had a bet except on the days when he had met a sweep.”

“ But suppose he lived opposite one,” I said, “ and couldn’t help seeing him, would that count ? ”

“ No,” said the sweep thoughtfully. “ I think it ought to be more accidental than that. Besides, gents don’t live opposite sweeps. No, of course it must be accidental, because there’s my missis—and no one could call her lucky. Rheumatoid arthritis isn’t lucky, and she’s

The Sweep

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Encounters and Diversions

doubled up with it. And she sees me often enough. No, I think it has got to be accidental," he repeated.

He began to collect his implements.

"Well, good morning," he said at Victoria. "I get out here. I live in the Vauxhall Bridge Road."

And he left.

Glancing round furtively to see that I was unobserved, I threw him a kiss.

The Charity Song



“ I HAVE just been to a Hospital dinner,” he said, “ and I’m so sure that the machinery for the extraction of money from guests is not yet complete that I have been devising a new implement.”

“ What is it ? ” I asked. “ A pick-axe ? ”

“ Not in so many words,” he said, “ but it corresponds. No, it’s a song. An argument with music. I haven’t had it set yet, but I’ve written the argument.”

“ I should have thought, from my own experience of speakers at charity dinners,” I said, “ that they left few arguments undeveloped. We should give because the object is the most worthy that could possibly be imagined. Whatever else might be questionable, this Fund demands support. We should give not only because we are generous, but even more so because we are just. We should give because

Encounters and Diversions

we are young, and the hospital is for the young. We should give because we are old, and the hospital is for the old. We should give because we are old and therefore shan't have many more chances to give. But you know it all."

"Yes," he said, "I know it all; but you don't. You have left out the real thing. You got near it when you said 'We should give because we are old,' but you missed the real point. You said that the old wouldn't have 'many more chances to give.' Now I am appealing to those in the audience who won't have *any* more chances to give."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"I'll read you the verses," he replied. "The time for the song is immediately after the last speech on behalf of the cause; and you want a jolly unctuous kind of fellow with an appealing voice. He might make a living going from dinner to dinner singing it. It begins:—

In the state of London traffic.

But I ought first to say that the opening line can be adapted for the provinces too. In Birmingham, or Manchester, or any of the

The Charity Song

places that have three syllables, you would say—

In to-day's congested traffic,

or

In our city's awful traffic ;

but in the ordinary two-syllabled places you would simply substitute another name for London. Thus :—

In the state of Bradford traffic,
for example. In Bath, you would say :—

In poor Bath's congested traffic,
or 'old Bath,' if you preferred it. Forgive me for being so minute, but I am anxious that this song should be at home wherever people's pockets are being shot at.

“ Now I'll begin again :—

In the state of London traffic
Who dare plan an hour ahead,
Since it's so extremely likely
He will be extremely dead ?
In our whirling world of motors
Who can call his life his own ?
Every crossing claims its victim :
Hark ! another dying groan !

But there is a silver lining, as we know, to every cloud :
To the wretch condemned to perish, mark the privilege
allowed—

Encounters and Diversions

Then the chorus, which says what the privilege is :—

When a man's to die to-morrow
He must reckless be to-day ;
All may confidently borrow,
None be empty turned away ;
When a man's to die to-morrow
How responsive he should be
To the sacred call of Sorrow,
To the cause of Charity !

“ By this time,” he said, “ they’ve got the general idea, and of course it’s a sound one. It was stated long ago, with more authority than mine : ‘ Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow you die.’ I merely apply it : ‘ Eat, drink and be lavish as well as merry, for to-morrow you die.’ How often I’ve heard men next to me at dinner at the Club say, ‘ If I were sure I was going to die to-morrow I’d have champagne this evening ; but, as I shall probably live for ever and I’m very hard up, I’ll have a whisky-and-soda.’ That is the notion. Very well, then, now for the second, or *ad hoc*, verse :—

It is practically certain,
Later, in the careless street,
One of you, returning homewards,
With an accident will meet ;

The Charity Song

You, perhaps, or you, or you, Sir ;
None can tell, but this we know ;
This may be the last occasion
Your benevolence can flow.

As it is the last occasion let it flow with all its might !
Pens and paper lie before you, and remember as you
write :—

When a man's to die to-morrow
He must reckless be to-day ;
All may confidently borrow,
None be empty turned away ;
When a man's to die to-morrow
How responsive he should be
To the sacred call of Sorrow,
To the cause of Charity !

“ ‘ Now then, Gentlemen,’ the singer will
say, ‘ all together ’ :—

When a man's to die to-morrow
He must reckless be to-day ;
All may confidently borrow,
None be empty turned away ;
When a man's to die to-morrow
How responsive he should be
To the sacred call of Sorrow,
To the cause of Charity !

“ Loud applause, followed by the scratching
of pens. What do you think of it ? ”

“ I think it might be tried,” I said. “ I
think you should find a composer.”

The Dead Hand



IT was that glorious time for Londoners—the first day of the year on which the top of the buses looks inviting—and, stimulated and excited, I climbed up. After months of inside—and why are they making the seats just by the door so high? Half the male passengers' feet, and all the female, dangle—after months of inside it was wonderful to have a dominant seat again, a place in the sun once more, and watch the city unfold. I began by playing an old bus game of mine—betting myself some trifling sum that I should see some one I knew before the end of the journey: not necessarily some one I knew to speak to, but by name; but this was cut short by a talkative old fellow who plumped down next me and opened fire at once. On ordinary occasions I might have monosyllabled him into silence; but on this

The Dead Hand

morning the vernal impulses were too strong :
I was a universal benefactor.

So it seemed was he ; for his talk ran on nothing but altruisms. He had a newspaper in his hand and he pointed to a paragraph. It said that a certain lady who had recently died had left an old servant a legacy and ten pounds a year extra on condition that she looked after two favourite dogs as long as they lived.

It was headed :—

“LUCKY DOGS INHERIT.”

“Every one,” he said, “must have noticed how ready the papers are to print any odd thing in a will. They always even give it a headline : ‘Curious Bequest,’ or something like that, which they would never do if it were merely the gift of a living man and not of a dead. You know the sub-editor’s instinct for adjectives—how he is never so pleased as when he can use such words as ‘curious,’ ‘strange,’ ‘remarkable,’ ‘sensational,’—all certain as an attraction to readers. Very few readers can resist ‘curious,’ none ‘sensational.’ That’s so, isn’t it ? ”

Encounters and Diversions

I agreed. I liked him. He was a new kind of bus-top talker. As a rule they only grumble at the traffic control or wonder who the dickens the people are who have time to spend half the day in theatre queues.

“Very well,” he said; “if publicity is always given to anything out of the way in wills, it follows that those of us who have to die and want to benefit posterity will have to put our wishes into testamentary form: ‘Betterment by codicil.’ Let that be our motto.”

“But why won’t the papers print such things about living philanthropists?” I asked.

“They’re afraid it might be advertising something or some one,” he said. Very suspicious lot—editors.

“No,” he resumed, “the hand that is to help must be dead. It is a wonderful opportunity for bachelors, old maids and persons with even only a little money and no dependents. What they do with their property now I have no notion; but let them in future make their wills with an eye to social amelioration. It can’t hurt them, and it may be of infinite service to the world they are disencumbering. Let them remember what the philosopher said

The Dead Hand

to the miser: 'You can't take your gold with you, and if you did it would melt.' Remembering that, let them do a little good with it. Isn't that so?"

Again I agreed. He seemed too good to be true.

"Now, looking round us," he went on, "what do we see that wants to be put right? Why, here is a case immediately under our eyes—the hands of the bus-conductor. See how stained they are by the copper coins he is receiving and paying out all day. Isn't that horrible—a beautiful thing like the hand all grimed and discoloured, almost ruined? Newspaper-sellers too—their hands are the same. Now how simple for some one to leave a few hundred pounds to provide gloves for those fellows! And how instantly the sub-editors would jump on to it and spread the glad tidings:—

'STRANGE HUMANE BEQUEST OF
KENSINGTON RESIDENT.
GLOVES FOR 'BUS-CONDUCTORS.'

That might make thousands of persons emulous.

"And then," he went on, "there's an iniquity

Encounters and Diversions

that always enrages me—charging for programmes at the theatre. How ridiculous to pay half a guinea, plus tax, for a stall, and then have to pay sixpence more to find out who is in the play. And the poor people in the gallery too, who can't afford another sixpence—what a shame! A right-minded manager would either give programmes away or throw the programme on the screen before the start and during the intervals. Why, a restaurant might as well make a charge for the bill of fare! A legacy to the Actors' Benevolent Fund conditional upon such reform might sting the managers into decency."

"Would you go so far as to establish a fund to provide hot coffee to the ladies who sit outside the Gilbert and Sullivan pit doors from seven a.m.?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I shouldn't. But I would like to do something to stop messenger-boys wasting hours there in keeping playgoers' places in the queue. That's not what that gallant little corps was founded for."

"You are a real social reformer," I said.
"Anything else?"

"Haven't you any suggestions?" he asked.

The Dead Hand

“Looking at these lorries in front of us,” I said, “I was wondering how long it would be before every vehicle, and especially the heavy lumbering ones that make such a row that the driver can hear nothing, is forced to carry a reflector. A sum of money left for that purpose might make the authorities first think and then act.”

“You’ve got the idea,” said my new friend. “And what about fitting taxi-cabs with handles to wind up the windows, and ash-trays? They’ve got to come, but very likely only a dead hand will be able to effect it. Think about it when next you look at your will. One should always be looking at one’s will with an eye to helpful codicils like these. Good morning; I get off here”—we were at Chancery Lane—“I’m going to see my lawyers about something of the kind now.”

“May I ask what it is?” I said.

“I want to induce the Great Western Railway to put inside catches to their carriage doors,” he replied. “A large bribe, of course, but worth trying.”

The Food of Yesteryear



IT is a fact sadly established in the sensory consciousness of all older people that the flavour of food, and in particular of meat, is not what it was before the war. Nothing is the same : I am aware of that ; but some changes, some deteriorations, are worse than others, and I place this one in a seriously prominent position.

Not only has the flavour evaporated ; the variety has gone too. We are in the hands of a ring ; a conspiracy has been organized to defeat the individual taste and compel it to join the mob. London has countless restaurants ; a few very dear and fashionable ; a few score that are dear and not quite fashionable ; and a vast number that thrive because they are cheap—the kind that every one is excited to “ discover.” The deplorable fact is that, save for price, all these restaurants are exactly alike in their menus ; they all serve precisely the same things. Beef,

The Food of Yesteryear

mutton, veal, chicken, rabbit (called chicken), and all the rest of it, day after day, evening after evening. Eating-out has become a habit; eaters-out are so excited to be eating-out that they can be bullied into accepting anything. And the result is this dreary monotonous round of obvious dishes, which, moreover, never taste as they should, either because they are badly cooked or because they are of inferior quality. Britons, who were never to be slaves, are slaves once more, principally to cynical Italian caterers.

Where are certain simple delicacies of yesteryear? Where is that ancient nocturnal amenity, the devilled bone? After the theatre, how agreeable it once was, too many years ago, to seek the Blue Posts in Cork Street and be sure of devilled bones! If the play had been good they came as a symmetrical savoury postscript to it; if bad, a solace. But where are bones devilled now; and, indeed, where are the bones fit to devil? Cold-storage, the friend of the modern restaurateur but the enemy of sapor generally, is peculiarly hard on them. Beef which, stiff and stark, has voyaged from distant lands and must be thawed before it is cooked,

Encounters and Diversions

is not the beef to bring bliss to the London play-goer. Few inventions have done anything to accentuate the simpler pleasures of life, and cold-storage least.

I am feeling particularly sore on this subject because the other day a friend from India, whom I was taking round London after fifteen years' absence, and whom I wished to make happy, expressed a longing for devilled bones ; and they could not be found.

"Nobody asks for them now," said head-waiter after head-waiter.

"But if you announced the fact that you always had them, what then ? " I asked.

"I don't think so," he said. "People don't eat that kind of supper any more ; in fact, they don't eat supper at all except when they can dance—and then they don't want much."

Farewell then to devilled bones.

And to marrow bones, too, it seems, for I found it impossible on an impulse to give my poor friend that nutriment either. Only by ordering it some time in advance could it be obtained, and then not for certain.

"Nobody asks for marrow bones now," said the head-waiter.

The Food of Yesteryear

“ But if you announced the fact that you had them, what then ? ” I asked.

“ I don't know that we could,” he said. “ You can't be sure of getting them good enough. They're things that must be good to be nice at all.”

“ You mean,” I said, “ that frozen meat . . . ” but here, with perfect strategy, he found himself in demand elsewhere ; he had said too much.

And this, I suppose, is why every second-hand silversmith in London always has the same marrow-spoons in his window (there are some in Vigo Street that I have seen for years) ; no one needs them any more ; just as no one seems to want punch-ladles. Alas, for a decadent world !

But the self-protective ingenuity of the restaurateurs is not all ; there is a detestable snobbishness that is largely to blame. Certain dishes have become so unfashionable that if you want them—and they comprise some of the best food there is—you must either have them at home (after passages of not a little acerbity) or seek them in eating-houses where you will be too conspicuous if you do not wear your oldest clothes ; because—and this is the

Encounters and Diversions

amusing truth—the best food now belongs to the poor.

I will make a list of some of the delicacies which false shame has excluded from the West End menus.

Pig's trotters.

Here is an exquisite flavour indeed, allied to a curiously attractive texture. But where can you get them. In Paris they are served regularly in the most gilt-edged establishments, and in Paris people are supposed to know something about food, although foreigners have done much to debase its quality. But in London pig's trotters are vulgar.

Sheep's trotters.

To some extent sheep's trotters merit the eulogy that I have pronounced on the *pieds de porc* : but they are less rich. As *pieds de mouton*, accompanied by a sauce called *poulette*, they occasionally are permitted to patter into a London restaurant ; but seldom. Most of them find their way down East, and remain there to spread delight.

Cow's heel.

You see how I run to extremities—but that is not my fault ; I did not invent the beasts of

The Food of Yesteryear

the field and their charms. Who has eaten cow's heel? (Dead silence.) But it is exceedingly good, and in the form of calves'-foot jelly is your favourite restorative when you are ill. Calves' head you have tasted on occasion, and have liked; but cow's heel—never.

And now we come to the word of dread; the word which you have been fearing; the word which leads to the most deplorable exhibitions of affectation or ignorance: Tripe.

Let us not inquire too closely into its source; but let those who are wise eat it and be thankful for a preparation at once so nourishing and delectable. As for the others, let them continue to shudder. A restaurant that always kept tripe, seethed in milk with its proper companions, and let the world know it, would prosper; and, incidentally, it would be an excellent place for Diogenes to carry his lantern to. There, at any rate, would he find sincerity, if not necessarily integrity, in the highest.

And that reminds me that if I possessed the three indispensable ingredients in any enterprise—time, money, and enthusiasm—I should try an experiment that I have often considered: I should open a restaurant where only one dish

Encounters and Diversions

was served. It has been done with great success, and it could be done again, because the world is always turning round. When I first came to London there were a number of small eating-houses known as Wilkinson's, where boiled beef was the staple. It was always ready, hot or cold, and you went there for nothing else. The quality was not that of the famous *Bœuf à la mode* in Paris—Wilkinson was for a humbler purse and palate—but it was excellent in its practical, cheap way.

The Wilkinson's were many, but there was but one Tyson's. Tyson's was upstairs at the St. Paul's end of Cheapside, an offshoot of a Manchester firm which, for all I know, still flourishes. The peculiarity of Tyson's was that nothing was served but chops and steaks, and nothing was served with them but hot buttered toast. If there is anything better than a chop or steak served with hot buttered toast—I mean such chops and steaks as were in those days—I should like to know about it. But Tyson's has gone, and gone are all the Wilkinson's; the nearest things to them in specialization are Birch's in Cornhill, with its turtle soup and oyster patties, and The (or is it Ye ?) Old Cheshire

The Food of Yesteryear

Cheese in Fleet Street, with its two pudding days a week ; both some distance from London's restaurant zone.

None the less, I would, had I those three necessities of the scheme, venture a restaurant to-day that should attempt a specialization similar to Tyson's. I cannot say what the one dish would be ; but my customers should be minutely informed about it by a sign-board before they entered, so that none could consider themselves ill-treated if no long *carte du jour* were set before them. Possibly the Irish Stew House ; possibly The Saddle of Mutton ; possibly The Pork Pie ; possibly The Home of Tripe. (And such tripe !)

Hoots     

“**O**F course they won’t get out of the way for that,” said my friend, as his powerful car slackened down on our return journey by road from the delectable mountains of Dorset.

By “that” he meant the mild booming of the motor-horn, and by “they” a company of unruffled cows spreading right across the road and shambling from side to side of it: less than perturbed by our onset—deliberately disregarding it.

“If a motor-horn sounds exactly like the friendly cow herself—as this one does,” he resumed, “why should she be expected to take alarm and give way? If you want to make a cow jump you must have a motor-horn that emits a sound that she dreads—such as a dog barking.”

“Of course,” I said. “Why haven’t I ever thought of that for myself?” I added.

Hoots !

“ What a chauffeur really wants,” the road-hog continued—for he is a road-hog ; in fact, you have but to scratch any motorist, however gentle in exterior, to find that animal beneath his skin—“ is something like an organ with stops. Without something like that he will never get the road clear, never have all the impediments removed. For warning other motorists and for the drivers of carts the present horn is more or less all right ; but it is the infernal creatures not on wheels that are the real trouble. Here are these cows, for example ”—and it is true that the obstructionist creatures were still there, although by advancing at the slowest possible pace and now and then scraping a leg or a flank with our mudguards, we were gradually cleaving the obstacle—“ here are these cows undismayed by anything but a dog’s bark ; therefore there must be a stop in the organ to produce a bark. Next, what about sheep ? The bark would probably be all right for them, too,” he added, “ and for cats. But obviously it would never frighten a dog. For fowls and ducks you want a sound like a fox.”

“ And for foxes,” I said, “ a sound like a pack.”

He looked sternly at me. “ There’s no need to be funny,” he said. “ Who has ever been

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bothered by a fox ? Be practical. What other animals are there that impede the progress of the gods of the machines ? ”

“ Pedestrians,” I said.

“ Well, there you come to a great problem,” he replied. “ Because pedestrians are divided into so many varieties. For a large number the best kind of motor-horn would be a gramophone which uttered the words, in as commanding a tone as could be mustered—the original speaker could be a drill sergeant—‘ Stand still ! ’ or ‘ Don’t move ! ’ Because it is the people who start to cross the road and then, after pausing, run on or back, who soonest reach the hospital and the tomb. If they could be turned to stone, so to speak, by the drill sergeant’s decision and timbre, the chauffeur could easily steer clear of them. Do you see ? ”

“ Perfectly,” I said.

“ Then there are the people who are too shrewd and cautious to be run over but who disliking motoring much and motorists more, do their best, by crossing very slowly, to impede them and force them to do the most depressing and ignominious thing that can happen to a driver—reduce speed. This class obviously must

Hoots !

be frightened ; but how ? You must find a sound that terrifies them."

"Why not carry a revolver ?" I suggested.
"That surely would be simplest in the end."

"I quite agree," he said. "But the laws of this country are in such a mess there would almost certainly be trouble. Pursuit, inquiries, inquests : unpleasant consequences, anyway. Motoring will never be the joy it was ordained to be until a lot of vexatious restrictions are removed from the Statute Book."

It was at this point that the last cow was passed and we leapt ahead.

"But we are getting into deep water," he went on. "The motorist, I fear, will always have enemies until roads are made exclusively for him and pedestrians have tunnels to grope through. May that day soon arrive ! Meanwhile let cars be fitted with all the necessary stops and horns !"

At this moment our high speed suddenly vanished and our motor-horn began to fill the air with those distressing sounds which have done so much to endear this new form of traffic to rural dwellers. The cause of the delay was a leisurely motor-cyclist ahead, with a side-car attached, who was holding the crest of the road

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—his only chance of a level passage—without giving the least sign of being aware that anything could be behind him wanting to pass. The side-car amateur has reduced this wilful unconsciousness to a fine art, and this exponent was masterly. He disdained pretence altogether ; he put up no affectation of being absorbed in conversation with his companion. He merely went on his undeviating way with the conviction that his own trifling conveyance was the only car on that road, or on any road, or in the world.

Well, we boomed at him for two miles, until, with the faintest suggestion of a smile on the back of his head, about his huge ears, and on each of his rounded shoulders, he turned down a by-road.

My friend was black with rage.

“ That’s where the organ and its stops are always going to fail you,” I said. “ It is not pedestrians who are the motorist’s worst foes ; it is motorists. The triumph of the foot passenger is only momentary, but the driver of a side-car who wants to keep in the middle, right on the camber, can last out, at any rate, long enough to spoil your temper sufficiently to make your next meal disagree with you. And I expect he always will.”

Secrets



IN Bruges, not so long ago, I was examining, with the assistance of the old furniture dealer, a writing-desk of some antiquity. Fine as was the workmanship, rich and rare as was the old hard mahogany (*acajou*) from which it was made, and distinguished as was its shape, the excitement of the dealer was reserved for a minor detail. A secret drawer. In point of fact, two secret drawers. It was these that rejoiced him, these that set him skipping about and uttering sounds of ecstasy. And I don't mind admitting that they delighted me too, and should I become a customer it would be the secret drawers' privilege to turn the scale. For they were exceedingly ingeniously contrived, not only in their position in the woodwork, but because two other drawers, less secret but sufficiently secret to cause an intruder to pursue his researches no further, covered their lair.

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Coming away I thought again of the fascination that the word secret always exerts. "I'll tell you a secret." "Do you want to hear a secret?" "I promised I wouldn't tell a soul, but I must tell you"—how sweet these phrases are, even though the actual communication means little or nothing, even though we knew them before! For too many secrets carry no surprise with them. "Do you want to hear a secret?" says a pretty girl, all smiles and eagerness. But what's the use when she is so ostentatiously keeping her left hand hidden behind her?

If I were in the mood to be pedantically logical, it could be shown that secrets that are told are not secrets at all. Some other word ought to be found for them. But terminological inexactitude has a thin time in a world with so active a newspaper Press as ours; and the Tenth Muse has never been able to control her passion for "secret" as a lure. Look, for example, at some of her favourite headings: "Secret History," "Secret History of the Week," "Secret History of the War," and so forth. What she means is Inner History, Hitherto Concealed History,

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or even Released History. Again, how we jostle each other when she offers us "Secret Revelations"; and could there be a more mutually destructive pair of words?

But "secret" will never lose its power, and for ever, when we hear of a new centenarian and rush off to interview him—I speak as a Fleet Street adventurer myself—and he says one of the two things that men who have lasted for a hundred years always say—either that they have drunk whisky and smoked all their lives, or that neither tobacco nor spirits ever made the faintest appeal to them—we shall continue to entitle the article "Secret of Longevity." But there was no secret—the old boy had been boasting about it ever since he was eighty.

It is a pity that the word "secret" has come so often to suggest infamy, vice, or at any rate something underhand and discreditable, whereas it might just as well denote the other thing. Thus, when the headline "Secret Life of Dead Millionaire" greets the delighted eye, the reason for the gleam is the hope—nay, the confident expectation—of voluptuous, sordid, or sinister details. But why should not

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the dead millionaire have masqueraded as an angel of mercy? Why should he not, as well as his mansion in Park Lane and his manor in Surrey, his yacht and his stud, have, under another name, maintained a Home of Rest for disabled clerks? That would be a "secret life" too; but unhappily no caption writer would draw attention to it in that way: at most, "Dead Millionaire's Anonymous Benefactions." The precious word "secret" is too valuable to be wasted on virtue.

As a friend to newspaper proprietors, it has but two rivals, one of which is "Sensational" and the other "Mystery." "Mystery," indeed, is so nearly allied to "Secret" that the sub-editor must often have difficulty in deciding upon which to display; but there is a difference. A secret is a fact; a mystery is we know not what, and often merely an invention. Secrecy, however, is of course an element of it. I have no space in which to pursue this alluring side-track; but I might say that the two best newspaper secret-mysteries or mystery-secrets of my time bear out the contention that secrets should never be told; for both faded into nothingness directly

Secrets

they were investigated. One was the Druce coffin and the other was the Humbert safe. So long as those receptacles remained closed the thrill was magnificent: we thought of little else than the alleged load of bricks representing the body of the eccentric Duke of Portland—half hermit and half Baker Street emporium-keeper—and the alleged untold gold in the Paris *coffre-fort*. I wish we still had those unsolved romances of real life before us, to make our days more amusing. But how insipid when the truth was known—the poor innocent Mr. Druce's remains exactly where they ought to have been, and the Humbert safe as empty as the Hubbard cupboard!

And now there is Joanna Southcote's box. Personally, I think the trustees of the British Museum, or whoever is responsible, are foolish in not opening it; but I feel very sure that all interest in that article will evaporate if they do so, and one of the very few secrets that can be called secrets will vanish.

The only true secrets are those which no one else can discover: that is to say, our own, the secrets which our own bosoms keep under lock and key, known only to ourselves, to our

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God and, if necessary, to our lawyer. (Possibly to our lawyer's clerk, too, but that is one of those things that we never, for certain, know. Some depths must not be plumbed too far.)

But lawyers ! I remember sitting at a public dinner opposite one of London's most famous legal advisers—the kind of man to whom you go only if you are guilty—and thinking what a terrible load of private information was concealed behind that gleaming shirt-front. Yet he seemed to bear it lightly enough, for he was as cheerful and conversible and convivial as anyone present. But what (I thought) a hullabaloo there would be should he suddenly lose control—he was then a great age—and begin to give his clients away ! How such hostesses as were innocent would clamour for the pleasure of his company ! What a rush there would be to sit near him !

It is often said that even the most scrupulous persons to whom a secret is entrusted make one exception, pass it on to one friend. This friend, I suppose, if he is sufficiently interested, makes his exception too, and so on ; and yet the phrase, “ I know it's safe with you or I wouldn't tell you,” continues to be used and

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to excite pride and pleasure in the hearer. Analysed, the desire to tell one other person is not exactly a treachery, for often the reservation, although unspoken, is understood, nor does it proceed from any uncontrollable tendency to blab. The other person—the one exception—usually is so intimate, even so beloved, as to be considered almost a part of the teller's self, or at any rate as a sharer of the teller's life and therefore a sharer of the teller's secrets too. Such special leakage is a risk which all confiders of secrets run, have run, and will run. But most of them are aware of it.

It is one of the many facile sarcasms flung at women, that they are unable to keep a secret; but my experience is that they are, at any rate, not less to be depended upon than men. There are at least as many indiscreet remarks in clubland as at mothers' meetings.

To speak of myself, I am far more interested in the light than in the dark. I can be told secrets with perfect safety, and people round me who have secrets burning their breasts can feel assured that I shall make no effort to probe them. I am still unaware of the

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identity both of the Man in the Iron Mask and the Gentleman with a Duster. I know that Sir Walter Scott was the author of the Waverley novels, but I am vague as to whether the writer of the "Letters to Junius" has yet been definitely traced. It was only the other day that I was more than startled by the disclosure that Mr. Arnold Bennett's first name is Enoch ; and yet I have been intimate with him all the century. This shows you !

To come back to the Bruges desk. Did I say whether I bought it or not ? But that is a—

The Invalid



MY old friend Pernick was a few minutes late for lunch, and when he arrived he was pale and shaking.

Long before I could ask him what was wrong he told me.

“I’ve just come from Harley Street,” he said. “I’ve been to a specialist. It’s terrible. My heart’s all wrong. I might go off any minute. I’m sorry if you find me a nuisance over my food, but I’ve got to be very particular,” he said. “Only the most easily digestible things.” He sighed. “It practically amounts to a death-sentence.”

I shook his hand again in sympathy. “Well, we’ve all got to die,” I said with the idea of being comforting.

“That’s a very gloomy view,” he replied, frowning. “And that reminds me—I must be most careful never to get ruffled, put out,

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the doctor said. Any sudden rage might be fatal."

"All right," I said. "And now for food. We'll find something safe, and edible too, I hope; and of course you'll have no cause for irritation. This is my lunch, anyway. Leave your hat and coat over there."

While handing his things to the attendant he talked a little with him, and I thought I caught the words "specialist" and "heart."

We went to our table and he seized the *carte du jour*.

Most waiters begin with the phrase "A nice Sole?" but this one remarked, "There's *Lobster à l'Américaine*," hovering with pencil poised.

"Now," said Pernick peevishly, "don't tempt me. *Lobster à l'Américaine*! That's the most indigestible thing you can tackle. I've just come from a specialist in Harley Street, who says my heart's all wrong and I must be careful; and you offer me *Lobster à l'Américaine*! It's monstrous. And I adore it too!"

I put my hand on his arm to soothe him.

"Yes," he went on to the waiter, "and you're making me angry. I'm losing my temper, and that may be fatal, he says. All the

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same," he resumed, " I don't see why I shouldn't have some of the claws. Lobster's claws are about the most digestible things there are. It's the back that's so bad for you. And you'll see that nothing but claws are served ? "

" You shall pick them out yourself," said the waiter.

" No, I'm not up to that," said Pernick. " I'm ill. That specialist rattled me. You do it. You're sure you like hot lobster?" he said to me.

" Go ahead," I replied.

" And what will you have to follow ? " the waiter asked on returning from giving the first order. " A nice chicken? A nice enbreoute ? "

" Well, whatever you choose," I remarked to Pernick gaily ; " it won't be this ! "—and I pointed to the words "*Caneton de Rouen*."

Never was a facetious warning less successful.

" And why not ? " he asked with some asperity. " Why not? Nothing's so good for you as a slice of a duck's breast, if it's tender.

" Can you guarantee that it will be tender ? " he asked the waiter, although surely in a restaurant this is a question that answers itself.

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"Certainly, Sir," the waiter replied.

"Then may we have duck?" he asked me. "Forgive me if I seem to be rather running this show, but on a day like this . . . I'm not quite normal, I know." He reached for the *carte du jour* with a look of infinite self-pity.

"Very well, then," he said to the waiter; "duck, tender, sage and onions, apple-sauce and sprouts, and"—he looked down the *carte*—"no sweet, but for a savoury, mushrooms and cream."

"My dear Pernick," I began in remonstrating tones.

He held up his hand. "Don't cross me," he said. "Remember, I mustn't be crossed. And what about a dry Sauterne with the lobster and a white Burgundy afterwards?"

"You order them," I said, and he did.

While we were waiting to begin, he saw Richardson enter, and he sent for him.

"I've very grave news for you," he said. "You'll be bowled out by it. I've just come from a specialist in Harley Street who says my heart's all wrong."

"That's bad," said Richardson.

"Yes, but that's not the worst," said Per-

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nick. "I've got to give up eating anything but slops—it practically comes to that. Isn't that awful?"

"Dreadful," said Richardson. "But if you're wise you'll do it. What I always say is, if you go to a specialist obey his order."

"Yes, yes," said Pernick, "I agree. I'm going to."

He enjoyed his lobster claws so much that he had a piece of the back too.

"No use being morbidly obedient to one's doctor," he said. "We're all different. A specialist seeing you for the first time can't know everything."

Unfortunately the Burgundy was not right.

"Corked, isn't it?" he asked me.

"I don't notice it," I said.

He sipped and held his head on one side with his eyes on the ceiling. Then he sipped again and held his head on the other side with his eyes closed.

"Yes," he said, "corked."

He called the wine waiter.

"This wine is corked," he said.

The waiter prepared to pour some into another glass to test it.

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Pernick stopped him. "It's no use arguing," he said. "If a customer says it's corked, it's corked. Get another bottle at once."

"But——" the waiter began.

"At once!" said Pernick. "And don't make me angry. You haven't heard that I've just seen a specialist, and he says that on no account must I be made angry. Get another bottle at once. You should have backed me up," he added, turning to me.

"But——" I began.

"No," he said, "I was right. My palate never errs. But don't let's discuss it any more, or I may get heated. They're very slow with that duck."

At this moment another of Pernick's friends passed and was stopped.

"I've got very sad news for you," said Pernick. "You'll be deeply grieved. I've just come from Harley Street, from a specialist. My heart's all wrong. Seriously wrong. And I dare say yours is, if you only knew; but the point is you don't know, and therefore you can go on having a good time. When ignorance is bliss. . . . But I know, and I've got to be careful. Self-denial is my line for the rest of my life."

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“ You’re beginning, like every one else, to-morrow, I suppose,” said the new-comer with a glance at the table.

“ What do you mean ? ” Pernick exclaimed. “ To-morrow ! I’m beginning to-day. Don’t be sarcastic with me ; I can’t stand it. The specialist told me that to be made angry might be fatal.”

“ I’m sorry,” said his friend, and passed on.

“ Cynical beast ! ” said Pernick. “ I hate that kind of thing. And now for the duck ! But I mustn’t eat more than a slice or two of the breast. See that I am sensible, won’t you ? ”

If I could not make him sensible, I could at least envy him his appetite. And then the creamed mushrooms ! But to my intense relief he did not sit on after he had finished them.

“ I shall have my coffee at the Club,” he said, “ if you don’t mind. There are a lot of men there who will want to hear about this. It’ll upset them terribly, I’m afraid.”

And off he went.

How little fun, I thought, can deaf-and-dumb men have when they too are sentenced to death by their doctors.

To be Let or Sold



AN ingenious editor casting about for what is known to the priests who serve the Tenth Muse as "free copy" has been asking persons of eminence to tell his readers some of the things on which they have "changed their minds." I am not to be numbered among those to whom the invitation was sent, but had I been I might have replied that I no longer hold the opinion, expressed many years ago in a light-hearted essay, that looking over a house to let was a pleasure that never palled. To-day I feel differently about it: not only because I hope never to "move" again, but because I am older, because I have too many other interests, because other people either are not such a fascinating study as they used to be or I have seen enough of them and their ways. If I were ever now to turn aside and go over a house without the legitimate reason,

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it would be to see what pictures were in it. I should keep a very wide eye for the walls. A great many pictures now in public galleries were found in houses to be let or sold, and there are several Vermeers yet to come to light.

The amateur house-hunter, as distinguished from him who wants a house, sets out on his quest far less to see the house than its occupants. I refer, of course, to houses in which the tenants still reside: the empty ones are negligible. Perhaps you did not know that there is so much curiosity about: that there are people with so little to do that they spend their time in "looking over" houses out of sheer idleness, inquisitiveness, or even mischief, being no more in need of a new domicile than a snail or a tortoise is, but finding a wicked joy in visiting agents' offices—perhaps morbid joy is the better phrase—and then presenting "orders to view": even, in a more than commonly depraved mood, asking the agent's young man to accompany them. How should he know, poor youth, whether their questions about the distance to the nearest post-office, the drainage, rates and taxes, and whether the vicar is high or low, ring true or not? How

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should he detect that they have no more intention of throwing these two rooms into one, and putting another bath, "for the maids," on the top floor, than he has of depreciating any of the undesirable desirable properties on his books? All, I have been told, that agents know for certain is that clients who appear to like the house they are looking at never return, but those who find fault with it may not impossibly do so.

I am not in a censorious mood, for how natural that it should be in other people, when all is said, that our principal interest resides! We may pursue this hobby or that; we may meet to discuss philosophy, psychology, religion, the new murder, or the musical glasses; we may profess an eremitical aloofness; but the proper study of mankind will continue to be man, and our real curiosity will be reserved for other people: where they live, how the devil they do it, and on what terms with each other. That poem of Robert Browning's called "House," in which an earthquake brought down the frontage only, tells the whole story:—
"You see it is proved what the neighbours guessed . . ."

To prove their guesses right or wrong may be a dominant impulse of the frivolous inquisi-

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tive house-hunters ; but the humorous would go, I fancy, more to hear what the present occupants say, for the people in houses to be let or sold are, more often than any others, what are known as “priceless” ; and they are never more so than when they are explaining their position. Human nature is rarely so amusing as when trying to get a house off its hands. Women at this task can be untruthful enough, but their untruth lacks the infusion of candour which a skilful male liar can introduce. A woman will say that everything is all right : the house is perfect ; she will regret to her dying day having to leave it, but she must ; and her reasons will be sound enough : she is going only because her dividends have dropped ; she has to unite in housekeeping with a widowed sister at Leamington ; she is settling at Nice by the doctor’s orders. But a man will ingeniously admit a fault here and there. “I’ll be perfectly frank with you,” he will say. (Beware of that !) Then he laughs. “Of course I’m an idiot to tell you this,” he continues : “a real man of business would keep it to himself ; but there are a few days in the year—not many—perhaps six all told

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—when the wind from that quarter touches you up almost unbearably. Beyond that I can think of nothing. It's really a wonderful place and we're heart-broken at having to go. But this cursed Government, you know. Taxation! You're lucky to be able to take it!" Then (beware of this too) he is almost certain to add: "I wish that you would promise me one thing. If you take it and if ever you want to give it up, let me have the first chance! If things are easier then, I'll come back like a shot. You'll promise, won't you?" This is very disarming, but the genuine house-hunter must be on his guard.

There are various means by which we can learn about other people, from the pages of *Who's Who* to dinner-table gossip, but none is more amusing than to go over their houses. That is why house-hunting is among the National Sports of Great Britain, even if Henry Alken never illustrated it. To the frivolous house-hunter, as distinguished from the genuine house-hunter, an Englishman's house is his museum and his secret *dossier* combined.

But all houses are not equally the key to characters. Where some tell you everything,

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some tell you little or nothing : perhaps because the owner's real life is spent elsewhere. In other words, you may be in the wrong house. Where some people never seem to belong to their houses, others are intimately linked with every room. I have a friend who has moved five times in the last twenty years, but all those five houses have seemed the same to me ; they have been so full of her personality that there was no room to notice anything else. All five houses have been so characteristic of her that one felt that the address " Olga's New Home, London," should be enough for St. Martin's-le-Grand, especially after its constant boasting about the sleuths that abound there.

At the other extreme are the householders who are merely lodgers, whose homes have no more individuality than a hotel ; and the hotel, of course, is the perpetual proof of the powerlessness of furniture to create atmosphere unless its own human beings are there too. For it is not enough to select an arm-chair : one must sit in it. You may take the cosiest room you know and replace everything in it, word for word, in an hotel sitting-room of the same shape and size, and instantly the spirit of comfort will

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evaporate. The reason, of course, is that people in hotels strike no roots. The French phrase for chronic hotel guests even says so : they are called dwellers *sur la branche*. The only way to make a house livable-in is to live in it.

I have never seen "Chequers" and am unlikely to see it unless as a visitor, but I always wonder what are the feelings of the Prime Ministers whose home it so precariously is. Do they really feel at home there? Did Mr. Baldwin knock the ashes out of that incurably public pipe wherever he happened to be, or did he cross with solemnity to the fire-place? For what one does with tobacco ash is the ultimate test. Speaking for myself, I could never be at home in a house if I had no sense of security as to my tenure of it. No one can have that in the last final sense, of course, because of the beating, increasingly loud as we grow older, of the Angel's wings ; but (short of death) without any stable feeling, how can one bring oneself to tell the builder to put a cowl on the smoking chimney, or the carpenter to mend the shutter? These are the things we do for ourselves or not at all ; certainly not for the fellow who is going to turn us out at the next election.

To be Let or Sold

“Chequers,” itself, will that too one day be to let or sold? Will there always be Prime Ministers in that genre? The surrender of Devonshire House a year or so ago was a great shock; and Mayfair’s inclination to follow suit can be learned by a walk to-day through any of its once so secure streets, where the agents’ boards are as thick almost as the forest from which they were cut. The thought of the rich and the luxurious and the deeply-entrenched giving up their mansions leads to the other extreme. History, I fancy, does not relate what became of the simplest residence of all—the tub of Diogenes—when it was vacant after his death. It would be amusing to know. Was it cut up into souvenirs for young cynics—chips of the old homestead—or were efforts made to find a new tenant? I seem to see the advertisement: “To be let or sold (by order of the executors of Diogenes, deceased) commodious, well-appointed, old-world tub. Would suit gentleman of retiring habits. May be viewed by appointment. Apply Messrs. Steady and Steady, Athens.” Perhaps the Prime Ministers of the not too distant future will be lodged thus!

Within our Gates



“ I HAVE been learning things lately,” said little Mrs. Kingsbury. “ Two things.”

“ Only two ? ” I asked.

“ Two is a large number for one day,” she replied. “ And, even though such knowledge is depressing, I’m rather bucked about it, because after a certain age one learns so little.” She sighed. “ But all in a flash last Thursday I learned two things. One thing I learnt was the best way to discover how different different people can be.”

“ Yes,” I said. “ And the other ? ”

“ We’ll take them in order,” she replied.

“ Very well then,” I said, “ tell me how you learned the first.”

“ By letting my house for the summer,” she said. “ It’s infallible.”

“ You don’t mean to say you’ve let ‘ Meadow Peace ? ’ ” I exclaimed.

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“Yes,” she replied. “Aubrey said he was very hard up; we had a lot of invitations; the children are off our hands—worse luck, for it makes it useless any more to keep up the pretence of being young; and so when a good offer came I agreed. It was a terrible wrench, but I gave way; but not, of course, until I had every kind of reference and testimonial. The people were said to be perfection: quiet, cultured and all the rest of it. No young, no dogs.”

“I thought you liked dogs,” I said.

“Not tenants’ dogs,” she replied. “You’d have thought,” she went on, “that the same feeling for the façades of country houses would mean a certain similarity of character, wouldn’t you? I like the look of ‘Meadow Peace,’ and these people liked it sufficiently to pay a ridiculously high rent for it. Therefore, one would have said, they and I must be more or less the same somewhere. A fallacy! Take it from me that the people to whom you let your house for the summer are less like you than anyone in the world.”

“And how did you find that out?” I asked.

“I’ll tell you,” she said. “A few days ago

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there was reason to get some papers from Aubrey's desk. It had to do with a deed or investment or something masculine ; and as Aubrey refused to go, of course it fell to me. So I wrote to the tenants asking leave for the visit, and of course they said ' Yes,' and I went.

" It is a strange, horrid feeling," she continued, " ringing the bell of your own house, especially when the door is wide open, as this was ; but of course I did it. I was admitted by my own parlour-maid, who looked at me with an expression I had never seen on her face before—one half recognition and welcome, but the other half reserved for her temporary employers.

" The tenants had tactfully absented themselves ; and it's as well that they had, for I don't know what I might have said to them. For it was awful—terrible !

" You know those stags' heads in the hall ? the ones Aubrey brought back from Scotland year after year ? Well, they had all gone. Not a sign."

" ' Where are the master's trophies ? ' I asked Parker.

" ' They're in one of the attics,' she said. ' The new people belong to the Prevention of

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Cruelty to Animals, and they couldn't bear to see them.'

"But that isn't the worst," little Mrs. Kingsbury went on. "In their place what do you think there was?"

"Texts," said I.

Little Mrs. Kingsbury opened her large blue eyes in astonishment.

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "But how did you know?"

"I guessed it," I said. "It was a natural corollary."

"Yes," she repeated—"texts. 'The new people are very religious,' Parker told me. 'Would you like to see the drawing-room?'"

"I said I would, although I suppose I oughtn't to have done so. But I was never silly about what are called nice refined manners. Still, I'll never do it again. It's a lesson. You remember the drawing-room? Rather comfortable and jolly? Well, they have done everything to make it stiff, ugly, formal, repellent. That big chesterfield, for instance. Obviously the right place for it is near the fire, especially during an English summer, with the light behind the head for reading. How could two persons

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differ about that? But these can. These people had put the sofa against a distant wall. And they had brought with them what I believe are called hassocks.

“And then,” she continued, “the other rooms. The billiard-table naturally was not used for its rightful purpose. ‘They don’t hold with billiards,’ said Parker. The table was covered with big books, under which flowers were being pressed.

“But it isn’t only that the furniture had been moved,” she went on; “there was a new atmosphere too. Their personality impregnated the place—governed it. Don’t you think that rather remarkable? Even if nothing had been displaced I should have known something was wrong. The household gods were all on their hind-legs: you felt it.”

“Well,” I said, “it’s a tragic story. And what is the second thing that you learned?”

“Surely you have guessed that?” she replied. “That one should never visit one’s own house while there are tenants in it. Fatal.

“And now,” she concluded, “I’m wondering if the house can be got right again; if the new spirit can be exorcised; if the household gods will ever come down on all-fours again?”

Within our Gates

“Of course,” I said. “The spaniels and Aubrey’s cigars will soon see to that. But if they don’t, you must give another house-warming. In fact,” I added, with the inspiration that comes occasionally to chronic guests, “I think that all houses let for the summer, even to sympathetic tenants, should be re-warmed. Mrs. Kingsbury’s re-warming party might inaugurate a most delightful new fashion.”

The Bunch



IN a hillside vineyard above Epernay a bunch of grapes was ripening in the sun of the Marne, and as they ripened they talked.

Like many young things about to enter the world, they talked of what might be their lot and what they wished to do.

“You have a great destiny in front of you,” said the Vine. “You are going to be champagne. You are going to be drunk only by the rich—chiefly the new rich and the temporarily rich. You will froth out of bottles at banquets into beautiful glasses, amid flowers and silver and rich dishes. Men in white shirts and women with low necks will talk the more gaily for your sparkle.”

“Are we going to sparkle, Mother?” asked one of the Grapes. “How delicious!”

“Yes, it’s your special privilege. And you will be very expensive. You will cost scores

The Bunch

of francs a bottle, whereas many of your relations in the vineyards over there will only cost two or three. You are of the elect ! ”

“ And what are the other places where they will drink us ? ” one of the Grapes asked.

“ All kinds,” said the Vine. “ You may find yourselves at weddings and christenings and at coming-of-age parties. The wine is not unknown at race-meetings. Indeed, it marks most festivities here and everywhere.”

“ I should like to be drunk at a wedding,” said a sentimental Grape. “ I should like to be in the glass which the bridegroom raises to the bride, who may be the most lovely of her sex and the most charming. But if that is not my good fortune,” it added, “ I should like to be drunk at the christening of their first child. That would be a life worth living.”

“ Very pretty,” said the Vine. “ But it is all a gamble. You might equally be drunk at a lunch party of financiers, where you will come in useful to dull some victim’s judgment. ‘ When you see champagne at lunch suspect a swindle,’ said a wise man.”

“ Then aren’t we always the friend of man ? ” the Grape inquired.

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“By no means,” said the Vine. “You can get into his head and make him do a thousand foolish things.”

“But we couldn’t harm women—beautiful women?” the Grape asked anxiously.

“Yes, and women too,” said the Vine.

“I should like to be drunk at the banquet that follows the settlement of the Reparations question, which the Vines are always talking about,” said another. “There must be wonderful speeches on such an occasion. I should like to be sipped by the French Premier as he affirms his total satisfaction.”

“You’re very pessimistic,” said a neighbouring Vine who had been listening, and who was famous for her cynicism.

“Why?” asked the little Grape in surprise.

“Because,” said the cynic, “none of you will get into bottles that are ready to be drunk for at least seven years; at least I hope you won’t; but there may be exceptions.” She laughed sardonically.

“Oh, how disappointing!” said the patriotic Grape.

“It’s a fact,” said the cynic. “Isn’t it, neighbour?”

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“Yes,” said the mother of the little Grapes, “it is so. I hope that none of you will be consumed before then. You will be in bottles till then, or possibly not at all, for there may be something wrong with you. And even if you reach the bottle stage you won’t necessarily be drunk in France. Many of you may stay here, but others will be treated with chemicals and sent to England, where they like us dry, or South America, where they like us sweet.”

“But what would England do for champagne if she and France fell out?” asked the patriotic Grape.

“Ah! that’s a question,” said her mother. “She would have to drink what she’s got and then go without.”

“Are there no grapes in England?” some one asked.

“Only the stupid fat ones that grow under glass,” said a cynic. “None worth calling grapes. You can’t have real grapes to make wine with if you have no sun; and there’s no sun in England. England has nothing but weather.”

“Wouldn’t England be very unhappy without champagne?” the other asked.

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“ Very,” said the cynic.

“ And does France get anything from England in return to make her gay ? ”

“ No,” said the cynic. “ Nothing but tourists, and they only make her rich.”

“ And does she want to lose them ? ”

“ Not at all. But when people are angry they forget what is good for them, and what risks they run, and everything.”

“ Do tell us,” the sentimental Grape asked the cynical Vine, “ what the exception is. You said there might be a chance of being drunk before seven years.”

The cynic laughed. “ Not drunk,” she corrected, “ but made use of. You might get into one of those bottles of damaged wine which are reserved to be broken over the bows of newly-launched vessels, in which case you will fall straight into the dirty water of the dock.”

The Bunch shuddered.

“ And what about America ? ” another Grape inquired. “ Does she make wine ? ”

“ She used to make a little,” said the Vine. “ But she mayn’t any longer.”

“ Mayn’t ? ”

“ No, she’s decided it’s bad for her.”

The Bunch

“ Wine ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ But how can wine be good for one country and bad for another ? Are the French and Americans so different ? ”

“ I can’t say,” said the Vine. “ It’s beyond me. But there it is.”

“ And is America perfect now ? ” the Grape inquired.

“ Naturally,” said the Vine. “ Directly you forbid people to drink the juice of the grape they become perfect. It notoriously is the end of all trouble.”

“ Then none of us will ever reach America ? ” the Grape asked.

“ I think we have talked long enough,” said the Vine. “ I never had such inquisitive children before.”

The Eternal Problem ∞ ∞ ∞

AS I was walking the other day down a Campden Hill road, very obviously on my way to Kensington High Street, an odd thing happened: I heard a whistle behind me, and looking round was conscious that a fat man in his shirt sleeves, whom I had just passed at an area gate—unmistakably a butler—was beckoning to me. I hesitated, thinking in my superior way that there must be some error. But no, it was at me that he was gesturing; and so I went back, when with many apologies he asked me if I would tell a cabman at the nearest rank to come to such and such a house. He would go himself, he added, but he was rather lame.

Well, I said I would, and on the way I thought much about the unusualness of the request: why it was unusual; why it should be unusual; by what right I had in the least resented it; what other men less amenable would have done.

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I thought how very lame he must be to have been able to overcome the ordinary reluctance of servants to call for assistance in this manner—off their own plane, so to speak ; I thought of the gulf normally fixed between butlers in their shirt sleeves and people who wear the kind of coat that—with no wish or intention of marking class distinction—I chanced to be wearing. For when all is said, it is coats that determine social position, and, if they are good enough, make it very difficult for fat butlers in shirt sleeves to whistle to strangers who are wearing them and to use them as messengers. I must assume that my expression was so benign that it cancelled Old Burlington Street's sartorial efforts ; although that is not what is commonly said of it.

But most of all I found myself thinking of what is called the servant problem in general and the difficulty that so many persons (although by no means all) seem to be having, first in persuading young women and young men to come to their houses, and then to keep them there ; and I wondered how much of this difficulty was the fault of the employers.

Most articles on this problem adopt an attitude

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hostile to the servant, or, at any rate, if not hostile they suggest that anyone who prefers to lead a free evening and free Sunday life, even under irksome factory or shop conditions, rather than to subscribe to the restrictions of a household, with fixed evenings off and so forth, is unreasonable. That is the word : unreasonable. This is largely because the writers of the articles are usually those who are in the position of employers. My own view is that the wish of these young people to have more control of their own evenings and Sundays is natural, and I sympathize with it, but I also think they are wrong. I think that most of them would be much happier if they served for a while in families ; and although no doubt there are houses where discord and suspicion and impatience and even intolerance rule upstairs, I should guess that most families get to be quite good company.

As a matter of fact, domestic servants are better off than most of their employers, for they have few of their worries. Some of them have to cook the food and some have to carry it to table ; but all of them eat of it later, and none of them have to pay for it, as the master

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of the house does. They have no anxiety about their meals, none about their lodging, none about income tax. Their wages are regular. They always have a fire, whereas far too many mistresses indulge the distressing habit of allowing the calendar to control the heating of their own rooms : even the English calendar, and we know what a one-eyed affair that can be ! Servants even have their laundry paid for. If only they knew what the privileges of an ordered and protected life were, they could be the happiest creatures alive, instead of too often specializing in grumbling and discontent, and complaining of the distance to the nearest cinema, and giving notice.

They ought to think themselves lucky indeed to be lodged, nourished and paid, in perfect security, in return for a few trifling services. I know that often, when that mixture of weariness and financial panic to which writers are susceptible attacks me, I wish I was in the soft job of my friend James, who is called a butler but is really the beneficent tyrant of one of the nicest houses in England, situated among pine-trees and herbaceous borders, with a cellar by no means to be sneezed at and no questions asked.

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If anybody had any real liberty, any real independence, and owed subservience to no one, then the reluctance of people to be servants would be more understandable. But since we are all servants. . . .! Whenever I hear the suggestion that to be a servant is a humiliation I think of the highest personages in the land. If ever there were overworked servants, eternally engaged in performing offices of which they must be heartily tired, but doing them well and cheerfully, despite the exacting nature of some of them, it is the King, the Prince of Wales, and other members of the Royal Family.

I have never been a domestic servant, but I have done enough amateur cooking to have for professional cooks an admiration that can hardly be set down in words : first, for the fact that they can cook at all under the conditions of heat that an ordinary kitchen knows, and then, and even more, for their ability to preserve the rhythm of the meal : to send up not only the joint, but the accessories that go with it, at the same time, and to allow no long intervals in between. A cook who, on the day of a big dinner party, can keep her head, keep her temper, but keep no guest waiting, is a great

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master, and if I were standing anywhere near Lord Rothermere I should take off his hat to her. In default of that, I take off my own.

Nor is my admiration confined to cooks. I admire pretty parlour-maids, too, and know how charming they can be, especially when they are charming. In fact, any servant who can smile is in an enviably strong position.

As for employers, it is impossible to lay down any hard-and-fast rule. There are strange anomalies in this matter, and where one employer can do nothing right, another, and presumably a very selfish one, can do nothing wrong. The art of dealing with servants is one of the rarest, and I am not sure that it has not to come as much by chance as that of painting or music : one has it or has it not ; it cannot be acquired. Without it you will never have good service : with it you can get what you like out of the staff, no matter how unjust your demands seem, to others, to be. That bugbear of the basement, "overwork," is hardly mentioned in houses where this art flourishes, however incessant the work may be.

A wise woman to whom I was speaking on this question said that in her opinion the mistake

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that too many mistresses make is not to allow for individual peculiarity in servants. "Too many mistresses who are untrained," she said, "tell their trained servants how to do things; which obviously is absurd. A housemaid has been prepared for her task, and has her notion of how to carry it out, and probably would carry it out very well in her own way. But she is not allowed to; a mistress who has never been a housemaid in her life orders her about. This annoys her, even exasperates her, and the mischief is done." That seems to me to be logical. "Again," the oracle went on, "there is far too much adherence to cast-iron rules. In how many houses has the rose room to be done on Thursday and the blue room on Friday? But supposing the housemaid didn't want to do the rose room on Thursday—she might not be feeling well, she might have bad news from home, she is as entitled to moods as anyone else—what harm would be done? The room would be cleaned all right, even though the time-table were a little dislocated. Elasticity is imperative," she concluded.

My own experience is that the mistresses who are best attended to by their servants, and

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who keep them longest, are those who exact most work and most alacrity from them, and who maintain the sharpest division between upstairs and downstairs. The best servants much prefer to have this gap ; they are shocked when what are called gentlefolk shake hands with them.

But it is a delicate matter on which to generalize, for there are also the servants who are miserable if no bouquets are flung to them. Those persons who were sent to the perusal of " Tancred " by the recent stage version of that novel, or who had known it before, will remember the scene early in the story where the famous chef breaks down in his great task of preparing the coming-of-age banquets because he has received no word of gratitude or encouragement from his ducal employer. He had strained every nerve to make a marvellous dish, but not a sign that it had given pleasure had reached him. And then the tactful Lord Eskdaile intervenes and completely transforms his gloom into sunshine by reminding him that he is more than a chef ; he is an ambassador of culture ; that these barbarians are not ready yet, but that as they taste and partake of his creations they

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will acquire sweetness and light. The chef beams to hold so high a mission ! And, true enough, the next day the Duke sends for him and expresses his satisfaction, and all is joy.

All servants are not conscious artists, and all households do not contain a diplomatist like Lord Eskdaile ; but all servants have their jobs and make some kind of effort to perform them, and all households contain some one that corresponds to the Duke, and no harm would be done if praise were bestowed as often as possible (and even a little more) rather than as seldom.

Stop it with Flowers

A PROPOS of the eternal problem of which I have just been writing, I had a pathetic story from an old friend the other day.

“Servants!” she began, “Servants! I’m no good with servants, and neither is my husband. I’ll tell you of a case. We were in Paris for Easter, and I’ve never been so treated in my life as we were by the chauffeur we had. The hotel got him for us at I don’t know how many francs a day, hundreds and hundreds, and he did just what he liked with us.

“He was a tall, *soigné*, deferential man—his name was François—with perfect manners, and it was a duck of a car, with inlaid woodwork like a Brighton Pullman. I always wonder why they went to that expense—because you don’t get to Brighton any quicker for it, do you?—but I suppose people like it. Anyway it was a charming car and François was a good driver—a perfect

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driver, if you shut your eyes when he was taking risks. But somehow there don't seem to be accidents ever in Paris. Why, I can never understand, because Providence can't really like the French, can It."

"Then what was the matter with the man?" I asked.

"Matter? Simply this: he was never there when we wanted him. Always late. We ordered him for half-past ten the first morning; he arrived at a quarter-past eleven, smiling beautifully, holding his cap in his hand. It wasn't his fault, he said—he was desolated—it was the fault of the engine, which had refused to start. Well, you can't blame a man for that, can you? At least we couldn't.

"Well, we went for a drive and then to lunch, and it was clearly understood that he was to be outside the restaurant again at two. There could be no mistake. Henry held up two fingers and I said '*Deux*' several times. There can't be any doubt about '*deux*'; it doesn't sound in the least like '*trois*' or '*quatre*,' does it? Well, he arrived at half-past. Henry was furious; he had wanted to see a certain race at Auteuil and we were too late. The worst of it

Stop it with Flowers

was that Henry's horse won and he couldn't back it!

"And then, coming away, we couldn't find François anywhere; his was almost the last car to disentangle itself—and you know what a muddle there always is—and arrive at the gates. Some people hire those dreadful runners with tickets, but Henry wouldn't. He said he hadn't come to Paris to be swindled.

"Well, we rode back to the hotel in absolute silence. Henry was so cross, first with François, and then with me for not knowing the right French to abuse him with.

"At the hotel Henry complained to the manager, who said that he couldn't understand it; François was the best chauffeur on their list, with the best car: he would inquire. At what hour did we require him next?

"We said at eight, and at half-past eight, by which time Henry was almost a maniac, he drove gaily up—we were outside waiting for him—smiling all over. What Henry would have done to him I can't say, but just as he was springing forward François revealed a bunch of flowers and offered it to me. 'How sweet!' I said. I couldn't help it; and of course we could only get in, Henry growling like a dog, and say no

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more about it. They were those wretched French flowers, I admit, all squashed together too ; but to receive flowers from a chauffeur at all was too much. How could I have repulsed them ? Not even NAPOLEON could do that.

“ We had our miserable late dinner and saw the end of some performance ; but of course we had to take a taxi home, for François was invisible. Henry never spoke another word to me that night, and he went to the manager again in the morning and said we would have another man. But the manager only shrugged his shoulders. Impossible, he said ; there wasn't another car free in Paris. But he would like to assure Monsieur that there had been some mistake ; François had already called to say that he had waited outside the theatre till midnight and must have missed us. At what time would we like him that morning ?

“ ‘ At eleven,’ said Henry, swallowing hard ; he had to, as we wished to shop.

“ ‘ At eleven he will be here,’ said the manager ; and at half-past eleven, the picture of bland innocence and friendliness, he arrived, again with a dreadful bouquet, which I had to thank him for.

Stop it with Flowers

“ From that moment we were lost. He did just as he liked with us ; he stayed on and on in neighbouring cafés with his friends ; he slept heavily inside the car at the races or sat there reading the paper and smoking the worst cigarettes ; he dined long ; but we could do nothing because he always brought me flowers, and did it in such a way as to suggest that he had spent the intervening hours in the search for them, so that they might be worthy of Madame. Always Madame ; and they were proffered with the most charming bow and smile. Henry he never looked at ; I was his prey.

“ He was never punctual again, but he never failed to bring an offering, and such is my cowardice I never failed to receive it with apparent gratitude and delight. It poisoned our lives, for Henry used to say things in the car that I expected would blister the lacquer and bring the inlay off in strips. But as for having any pleasure in Paris this time, we had none at all. Even I was glad to find myself in the train for Calais, while Henry actually whistled.”

The Complete Introducer



I AM persuaded of this, that the whole manner of introductions at luncheon and dinner parties must be revised. A spirit of thoroughness must come in.

The other day, for example, I sat at lunch next to some one on whom I had no line whatever. Her name, which I misheard, as I nearly always do, conveyed nothing to me, and we talked odds and ends in a desultory way and were of no use to each other. Afterwards I discovered that she was the wife of a public man for whose work for the blind I have a peculiar admiration, and on this subject I could probably have induced her to be very interesting.

I feel the risks of missing the best of one's partners to be so serious that I have drawn up a scheme for hosts and hostesses which ought to add enormously to the amenities of the table.

The Complete Introducer

I will suppose you to be a man and a guest. As you enter the house or the room—the house is better, because you will have more time to apprehend the matter—you will be handed a card which will run something like this:—First, your name. Then, “You will have on your right Mrs. Travis Remington. Her husband is alive and they are still neither separated nor divorced. He is a railway magnate. Mrs. Remington’s special interests are gardening and water-colour painting. All her children are living.

“On your left will be Miss Rachel Twist, who once had a play about Savonarola produced by the Stage Society. She lives in Florence in the spring and summer, and is an authority on the Renaissance.”

With this information compactly to hand, you would know where you were, and could tackle either lady with confidence and the certainty of making no particular *faux pas*, while it is possible that from both, since you know their strong suits, you might even acquire something.

Meanwhile each of these ladies has been handed a card, on which you and another man are described. Thus, Mrs. Travis Remington is

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informed, " You will have seated on your right Sir Alfred Carver, the famous surgeon. But besides being a surgeon, specializing in the brain, and the owner of one of the best collections of Japanese lacquer, he is an enthusiastic humanitarian and he keeps a number of old and useless horses at his place near Camberley, where they spend their last days in comfort. Sir Alfred is happily married but has no family."

Every one will appreciate the necessity of mentioning these last details, so much conversation now turning upon the marital bond in its various degrees of severity or freedom.

The notice to Mrs. Travis Remington then describes you :—

" On your left will be Mr. Archie Punchible, who is a bachelor much in demand in society. He has never been known to eat at home any meal but breakfast, and that only from Tuesday to Friday. He has travelled much in the East."

Miss Rachel Twist's card naturally must begin with you :—

" On your right will be Mr. Archie Punchible," etc., repeating what we have just seen, and then, " On your left will be Mr. Adrian Scoper, who is an amateur of music and one of the first

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authorities on Scriabine and other modern Russian composers. He knew Tschaikowsky personally. He also has some very remarkable aviaries of small birds and talking parrots. He is a widower."

Thus informed, Mrs. Travis Remington and Miss Rachel Twist should know how to play their neighbours, and some not wholly meaningless conversation should result.

I admit that the scheme will give hosts and hostesses a lot to do ; but then guests, if they are worth asking, are worth thought and trouble. The real difficulty will come when some one cries off and there is a last-minute substitute. But that might lead to amusing misunderstandings, and these are always to be desired.

A Revolutionary Proposal



EVERY one must have been struck by the prevalence of dishonesty. Yet we all, by straining our memories, can recall isolated cases of the other thing. The problem is—Is it not possible to increase their number?

I have a suggestion towards solution.

It is at the moment impossible to open a newspaper without being confronted by reports of turpitude, from petty larceny to murder. Wives (we read) have been poisoned by their husbands, householders have been shot by burglars, hotel guests and actresses have been robbed, jewellers' shops have been rifled, confiding women have been deceived by bigamists, gold bricks have been sold to Colonial visitors, signatures have been forged, Chinamen have been caught selling cocaine, investors have been defrauded, horses doped, and thousands of small thefts have been committed. These

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are daily occurrences, and all receive the reward of print. Is it possible—since so great are the uses of advertisement—that the knowledge that publicity is to follow may have had an inciting effect on all those malefactors, and that, were no reports to be published, this tendency to crime would diminish or disappear? That may be too fanciful a notion; but at any rate we can never know till we try.

Supposing a newspaper were published with no reports of crime in it whatever? Is that too anti-social, too restrictive, an idea! If crimeless journalism became the rule it might, of course, land certain newspaper proprietors in the Bankruptcy Court; but how honourable a way for a peer of the realm to get there!

But, if records of turpitude are considered still to be essential to our civilization, might not space—of course not equal space—also be given to records of acts of virtue? Then, if the incentive of publicity is a fact, virtue might increase and every one would be happy. This kind of thing (I have made the heading lurid, but in course of time the reader would be more amenable to such a title as “Sensational Placidity in Kennington”) :—

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WIFE ARMED WITH CHOPPER.

Emily Tyler, 54, wife of a Kennington plumber, after many remonstrances with her husband for staying so late at his Club, lost patience and went herself to fetch him home, armed with a chopper. After extricating him from his companions she kissed him lovingly and led him quietly back arm-in-arm.

With these eyes I have more than once seen obviously needy persons standing at railway bookstalls, where, owing to the rush, customers' coppers have not yet been collected ; but they have picked none up. I have seen, in tea-shops, people sit down at tables just vacated, on which the twopenny or even sixpenny tip still remained, and make no attempt to pocket it. If those heroic creatures were publicly given credit for their valour in resisting temptation, would any harm be done ? Surely not.

All this is but exordium to the story of an incident which occurred to me the other day. I was in an omnibus going East along the Strand, sitting next the door. At a certain point somewhere near the Bush Building, while the conductor was on the top, a man seated at the far end rose to leave, and as he passed me he handed me a penny and asked me to give it to the conductor for him, and jumped off.

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Here was a case of peculiar honesty, for there are many persons of ordinary sound morality—as between man and man—who, if the conductor had chanced to forget to collect their fare and they were in a hurry to get out, would look upon it as a gift from Heaven and accept it in that spirit.

Others might employ the arguments of sophistry. The rights of companies, they might say, are notoriously less sacred than those of individuals; it is an adventure, and an innocent one, to bilk a bus; the block at Wellington Street, having been longer than usual, had meant an even graver loss of time than Londoners have lately been subjected to, and if anyone can induce the road-mending traffic-congesting authorities to attend to their business surely the omnibus companies can! Therefore, not having done so they should be penalised. The conductor had neglected his duty. And so on.

This man, however, was more scrupulous, and he entrusted me with his penny. I am proud to be able here to do honour to his action, and if I knew his name I would print that too, and his address.

But to such an extent are our minds saturated

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with suspicion, so prone are we to expect dishonesty and indecorum instead of virtue, gall and darkness instead of sweetness and light, that I have to confess, with shame, that when I related this incident to a friend of mine—or one whom I had hitherto looked upon as a friend—she asked, “ And did you give it to the conductor ? ” .

A world which, really, must be improved !

Unbirthday and Other Presents



WHOEVER it was that said that all presents were nice, but “unbirthday” presents were nicest, was a philosopher enunciating a general feeling. The unexpected is never so welcome as when it takes the form of an unbirthday present. There are only three other varieties, the birthday present, the Christmas present, and the wedding present, and of these the wedding present is the least interesting to buy. Both Christmas and birthday presents, except where great devotion or admiration exists, can be mechanical too ; but the unbirthday present invariably calls for real solicitude and even excitement. It is possible to give wedding presents, birthday presents, and Christmas presents without any thought or affection at all : they can be ordered by post card ; but the unbirthday present demands the nicest care. It is therefore the best of all, and it is the only

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kind to which the golden rule of present-giving imperatively applies—the golden rule which insists that you must never give to another anything that you would not rather keep for ourself, nothing that does not cost you a pang to part from. It would be better if this rule governed the choice also of those other three varieties of gifts, but they can be less exacting.

The unbirthday present, springing as it does from a desire to impart surprise and pleasure, naturally calls up one's finest feelings : one is going out of one's way to be a benefactor ; one is even enjoying it too, practically participating in it ; but the birthday present is a matter of routine, and its recipient can be so different from yourself that it might actually be a mistake to choose for her anything that you could bear to be seen dead with, as we say. For your dominating thought must be not to improve her taste but to gratify it. There are friends and relations—chiefly relations—whose taste is too deplorable to encourage, and to these you may safely give things that are above them ; but for the most part the proper plan is to give people what they would like best. When, how-

Unbirthday and other Presents

ever, the special occasion arises, give only what you yourself like best.

The unbirthday present is peculiar in having two distinct origins. It may materialize from the wish to mark a friendship, to underline a recent experience, to provide a laugh or a thrill. Ordinary presents are sought for because dates are drawing near on which certain persons expect to be made the recipients of our bounty. The procedure is to remember that So-and-so's birthday is approaching and to set forth to find something for it. But with the unbirthday present this procedure is, in many cases, reversed : it is the sight of something in a shop window which that dear little Mrs. Mumby (to whom you wouldn't be giving presents at all if you were wise) " would rejoice in," or which was " absolutely made for " Uncle Dick, that impels us to generosity. The steady search for something suitable for Aunt Matilda on her birthday, or Cousin Rachel on her marriage, or the twins for Christmas, can be amusing enough, but the sudden inspirations that fructify in unbirthday presents carry more fun or emotion and make benevolence more electric. I can think of no more delightful existence than to be a new Haroun

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al-Raschid with a passion for distributing anonymous and blue-sky gifts of this kind among those by whom they would be most valued.

There are certain things which should never be given as presents at all ; which we should either buy for ourselves or do without. Pictures, for example. It is very precarious to give anyone a picture. If you yourself admire it, probably its new owner won't, because two persons seldom agree in the appreciation of art ; and if you admire it excessively, your duty is to keep it —your duty both to yourself and to the artist. Scent, again : unless you are sure that the scent you choose will be welcome, never give it. The same remark applies to cigars ; but it is late in the day to say anything about the danger of a wife choosing her husband's cigars for him. Professional humorists have been doing their worst with that melancholy topic for many a weary year. Neckties too.

The present that requires thought and even imagination will always be difficult to select ; but the present that is just a present is a far simpler matter to-day than it was, say, twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, if you wanted to give a man anything, you gave him a cigar-

Unbirthday and other Presents

ette case or holder, or a match-box. A woman needed a greater exercise of brains. But to-day, when every woman smokes, you give a woman a cigarette-case, holder, or match-box also. And Dean Inge has been saying there is no progress !

Of the three mechanical kinds of present—birthday, wedding, and Christmas—the wedding present is the most perfunctory, but a few heroes are left ; the bull-dog breed is not extinct. “ Are you going to the Blanks’ wedding ? ” I asked a friend the other day. “ No,” he said ; “ but I was invited.” “ Then you’ve got to give a present ? ” I remarked. “ No,” he said ; “ I hate them both.”

What one gives to bridegrooms, I have no recollection ; but for brides I once invented a wedding present which appears always to afford satisfaction. I have to say “ appears,” because how is the giver to know for certain, thanks for presents being invariably expressed in the same terms of cordiality if not of positive ecstasy ? For no matter what we give our friends when they take the plunge into the dubious waters of matrimony, or on the anniversary of their own or our Lord’s nativity, we are always

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assured that the article was ideally chosen and that it filled an aching void. But the wedding present which I invented and which always has appeared to afford satisfaction consists of an old box that has pretensions to beauty—no matter of what it is made: ivory, brocade, silver, coloured glass—in which I place three pounds worth of postage stamps, each one carefully torn off. The stamps, it is true, in the course of time, disappear (perhaps I ought to endow these gifts?—that is a serious thought), but the boxes remain. They have to be beautiful enough to justify a long life; and in the search for them one can have a good deal of fun.

Incidentally one may also become bankrupt, because in the progress of the hunt, which naturally takes one sooner or later to Beauchamp Place and other similar danger zones, one sees so many other fascinating things. For those whose will is weak, whose purse is slender, and whose acquisitiveness or generosity is highly developed, London is at the moment no safe city. Such recently has been the multiplication of curiosity shops and the improvement in the taste of their proprietors (there is a most seduc-

Unbirthday and other Presents

tive new bunch of them in Lower Grosvenor Place, for example), that it is wisest to bandage one's eyes or stay indoors altogether. In any case, to carry a pocket cheque-book in these neighbourhoods is, unless one is a millionaire, a peril indeed.

While on the subject of cheque-books I should like to ask why it is that, so far as I know, only one London shopkeeper—and his shop is perhaps the most famous resort of those who would buy new presents—keeps a cheque-block on every counter? What the firm's losses may be by this alluring device I have no idea: perhaps the "drawer" never has to be "referred to" at all; but the extra sales that come about through it must be enormous. It is a clever shop in other ways, too, for as you set your foot on the entrance mat the door mechanically opens. How wise that is—to welcome the coming victim! Perhaps if all such shops adopted these plans, the giving of presents would be gloriously increased and the happiness of the world doubled.

The Voice of the Hand



I WAS reading the other day a murder mystery story in which most of the running was made by a masterly elderly French detective, whose private hobby was rose-growing. One of his remarks abides with me. So tell-tale, he said, are the eyes, that if the whole world wore a yashmak he would still be able to make accurate deductions as to guilt or innocence. This struck me as being rather sweeping. Trained observers like this marvellous Monsieur Boulot (if there are any) may be willing to dispense with the testimony, and even the corroboration, of mouths and hands, but I personally should need them as evidence, too. Hands tell so much. It would be wrong to say that one looks at hands before eyes, but very soon after. In railway carriages they can be far more interesting than the morning paper.

I wonder if the beauty of hands is less considered than once it was. I suspect it may be,

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because one of my earliest recollections is of being told that a pair of hands in porcelain on a table in the drawing-room were an exact model of those of the Countess of Dudley of that day. Well, the world now pays much more homage to lovely women than it did even then, and yet I have never seen porcelain models of the hands of any of our recent reigning beauties.

The last model that I recollect seeing was the plaster cast of Thomas Carlyle's hand at the little Carlyle museum in Chelsea, very delicate and nervous. And yet, that hands in reproduction are still not without their appeal is proved by the constant demand which, I am informed, there is in art shops for photographs of that drawing of hands joined in prayer from one of Dürer's notebooks. But, of course, it may be the religious signification of the picture that gives it its vogue.

Conjurers' hands, and particularly the conjurers who are clever with coins and cards, can be almost separate individualities ; you forget the man as you watch, and think of his hands as magicians on their own behalf. As a boy, how I toiled to emulate the gifted elders who were able to make shadow animals ! I admire

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them from afar still, but not with the passion with which I admire the pianist who plays from ear, surely the most remarkable of God's creatures ! Had I never endured the misery—almost the agony—of music lessons, I might admire them less ; but knowing with what difficulty I could hit the right note, even with the most careful thought and after great hesitation—and even then probably hitting the next one with it—I am the more bewildered by this easy ability, and ashamed at my lack of it.

To this day every pianist seems to me miraculous ; but the pianist from ear, the pianist who can instantly reproduce the tunes from the musical comedy you have just seen together for the first time—he is a demi-god. For such a power as that I would give anything that I have. Which reminds me that the Creator must smile a little when he thinks of the range of activities which the hands that He made, chiefly, as I suppose, to delve, to spin, and to convey food to the mouth, have added to those primitive functions. The hands, for example, of Tom Newman and Ignace Paderewski, the hands of Augustus John, the hands of that most accomplished of living jugglers, Rastelli, the battered

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hands of Harry Strudwick, the conquering hands of Jack Dempsey. But fisticuffs, of course, are no new development ; they began almost when the world began. I have had, by the way, the honour of meeting Jack Dempsey on a social occasion, and I can assure you that when I laid my own not inconsiderable paw in his, it looked like a leaf in the storm.

There used to be a joke, in the days when jokes about the Chosen People were more common than now, that if you tied a Jew's hands to his sides you made him dumb. But it would be more true of the Latin people, whose manual gestures are far more varied and constant. An Englishman and an American can describe a fight, a motor accident or a Rugby match—in fact anything but a spiral staircase—with their hands in their pockets ; but an Italian couldn't read a page of a Blue Book without gesticulation. It is as though the Latin hand were an independent organ of speech. This constant need of the hands to fortify conversations is perhaps one of the reasons why the Latin people so seldom have them in their pockets : that, and the circumstance that most Latin men carry purses. In England the purse is rare among men.

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Among the various privileges of hands, the jingling of money in trousers pockets surely ranks high? I am certain that no small part of the dejection which, on a recent visit to Austria and Germany, I noticed in the countenances of the men in those countries is due to the circumstance that they have no money to jingle. Paper money they have in profusion—paper money that used up my multiplication table very swiftly and left me gasping—but nothing to jingle. The jingling of money confers independence and authority on a man; the jingling of too much money leads to arrogance—but the risk perhaps is worth running.

I don't know whether an illustrated book about hands in pictures by the great masters has ever been prepared, but it would be of interest. Some, it is well known, paid little attention to them; Van Dyck, for instance, gives all his sitters the same hands, long and graceful and usually in the same posture—surely a very curious piece of carelessness on the part of one who must have been interested in character? But that he knew a great deal about hands is proved by the studies that he made; in Brussels there is a frame of them.

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Rembrandt was as far opposed to this neglect, or disdain, as could be, the hands in all his portraits being hardly less important than the features, and being always accurately drawn. In the picture erroneously called "The Night Watch," the hand of the man in the middle seems to be thrust right out of the canvas. That picture is in Amsterdam. If you want an example nearer home of Rembrandt as a painter of hands, there is his "Parable of the Unmerciful Servant" at the Wallace Collection.

The early religious painters of Italy had a convention of hands and gave all the saints and the Madonna the same. Perhaps Botticelli's are as beautiful as any, but they lack any special quality beyond length and slenderness and the suggestion that no work was ever done by their possessors more exhausting than folding them in ecstasy, or holding babies and flowers. The sculptor, Mino da Fiesole, made the longest fingers of all. Leonardo was perhaps one of the first painters to consider hands worthy of thought; but then Leonardo was first in so many ways. The hands of the Virgin in the picture called "The Virgin of the Rocks" in our National Gallery are lovely, but Leonardo's

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masterpiece as a painter is the extended hand of Christ in "The Last Supper," at Milan, the moment being that in which He tells the disciples that one of them is to betray Him.

There are many beautiful hands in the National Gallery ; those of the Virgin in Piero della Francesca's "Nativity" at one extreme of unstudied simplicity, and at the other the hands of the tailor in Moroni's famous portrait. The hand of the man sitting at the table in Peter de Hooch's "Interior of a Dutch House" is admirably drawn, and if you look at it closely you will see that it once held the glass that has now been given to the woman by the window.

Palmists, I suppose, are born and not made, or I might try to qualify. I always envy the professors of this mystery as they settle down to their occult task. I don't know what is the attitude to it of the Fellows of the Royal Society, but my own experience of palmistry comprises some very extraordinary results. Total strangers have read in my hands secrets that I alone could have told them. And why not ? Surely if the Creator could make Darwin tulips and peacock butterflies, the chambered nautilus and the starry heavens, it may be conceded that

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He could also, if He liked, amuse himself by writing our lives on our palms ?

But if palmists are under suspicion, manicurists most certainly are not, and I consider them to be envied, too. Manicure is an excellent profession for a girl ; it is not exhausting, it brings her intimately into association with a number of people, among whom a few must have something to say worth hearing, and she is devoting her time and thought to making those beautiful things, hands, more beautiful. A very worthy life ! Perhaps her tragedy, however, is that she misses the people who don't go to manicurists.

Two Financiers ~ ~ ~ ~

“IT is in no spirit of boasting,” he began, “no trafficking with what is known as swank, but solely in order to pave the way to the incident to be related, that I say that the other day I gave a beggar half a crown.”

At this very impressive opening we all sat up prepared to listen closely. Half a crown is a great sum.

“It was an absurd experience,” he said, “and I dare say there were better ways out of it than I took. Perhaps you will tell me.”

We made noises intimating that most of our lives were spent in telling people about better ways than they have taken. At least, I did.

“It was like this,” he said. “I had come up to Town for the day, my first place of call being at Islington. Now Islington is an unknown country to me. Beyond the fact that bailiffs have daughters there, I knew nothing.

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So I took a cab at Liverpool Street and gave the driver the address—an office. Well, the miracle of London traffic again occurred and we got there all right ; but while I was having the usual struggle with the window—this taxi having no inside door-handle and the driver being firmly nailed to his seat—a man hurried forward and opened it for me.

“ At the same time he proffered a box of matches and forced me to look at him. Now, I don’t set up for being one of the soft-hearted generous sort——”

Cries of “ Oh ! ”

“ No, I don’t. But this fellow really touched me. He was down and out. He was very shabby, very thin and haggard. Had been gassed, I should think, and was still periodically a victim. But the worst thing was his eyes. His eyes settled it. They had a depth of pleading in them such as—well, such as in a well-organized world one man should never see in another’s. It was awful.

“ Of course I had to give him something, so I put my hand in my pocket, took out the only coin there and presented him with it—half a crown. I admit to being rather shocked

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myself when I realized what the coin was ; but I gave it to him."

Murmurs of approbation.

" But if I was shocked the man was stunned. Expecting only a penny, he was overcome with joy and retired swiftly to a neighbouring doorway to collect his feelings and debate upon the best way to employ his fortune.

" Meanwhile I took out my pocket-book to find something for the cab-fare, which was two shillings ; and, behold, I had left it at home. I hadn't any money at all. I had given away my total capital. Now what would you fellows have done ? That is the problem. What would you have done ? "

" I," I said, " should have entered the premises I had come to visit and have borrowed the fare."

" I tried to," he said, " but the place was locked. No one there."

" I," said another man, " should have given the cabman my card and promised to send him not only the fare but a little more."

" I hadn't got a card," he said. " My cards and my Treasury notes dwell normally in the same pocket-book : the cards for a long while, the notes only on the briefest visits."

Two Financiers

“ It’s quite simple,” said another man. “ You should have pawned your watch.”

“ No, I couldn’t do that. My watch is too sacred. It was given to me.”

“ Then,” said I, “ why not have got back into the cab and told him to drive to the nearest place where you were known and could borrow money ? Money you had to have sooner or later, anyway.”

“ I know. I suggested it, but the driver wouldn’t do it. You know how independent they are. Either his home was near by, or one of those uncontrollable desires to eat an irregular meal, to which cabmen are so subject, came upon him. Anyway, he refused. Also, he had contrived at last to un-nail himself from the box and was beginning to look ugly ; and I hate that. I would do almost anything rather than have a row with a cabman in a crowded street. So what do you think I had to do ? ”

“ You don’t mean to say,” said some one in awe-struck tones, “ that you asked the beggar to give you the half-crown back ? ”

We all leant forward and held our breath.

“ Yes,” he said, “ I did. It was the only course left. He was still in the doorway arrang-

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ing the wonderful day that would begin when 'they opened,' and I went up to him. I never felt so ashamed in my life ; and I believe it's the first money I've borrowed for thirty years."

Sounds of astonishment and incredulity.

"It's true. Somehow I've managed not to have to. I'm not boasting ; I'm merely keeping to the point. Well, I faltered up to him, and I said, 'I'm most awfully sorry, but I've got to ask you to give me that half-crown back.'

"I shall never forget the expression on his face. Something like terror as well as pained surprise.

"I explained the situation, and the ghost of a smile crossed his lips. 'Of course,' he said, 'it's a pleasure to help anyone in distress. I know what no money means' ; and he handed me the coin."

"Good man !" we said. "And then ?"

"Oh, well, then I found another cab whose driver was unaware of my financial status and I drove to my bank as fast as he could go."

"And the beggar ?" I asked.

"Didn't I say ? Oh, he went with me, of course."

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AMERICANS.—Americans are people who prefer the Continent to their own country, but refuse to learn its languages. It is to Paris that, as a reward, dead Americans go who were good in life ; but one can also meet there Americans who must have arrived under false pretences.

ANSWERS.—Continental answers are very difficult to understand.

BILLS.—Long and bewildering documents made out in purple ink in which 4s look like 7s and 7s like 4s and 5s like nothing on earth, but which added together come to something simply appalling.

BILLIARDS on the Continent is less a form of religion than a game. Spectators at matches are allowed to talk. The balls are big and heavy and without any particular shape ; the cues are like jumping poles ; the tables are small, and there are no pockets. Often there

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are ninepins in the middle, and anyone who wishes to cut the cloth may do so. There is no such nonsense as a penalty for a miss.

BIRDS.—Most of the little singing birds on the Continent are seldom seen till they leave the kitchen. In Italy it needs several to make a dish for an adult.

BOOKS.—Continental books used to be much less proper than ours ; but we are catching up. They are not, however, so easy to read as ours. They usually need a dictionary, always need a paper-knife and are never bound in anything but paper. This means that the book-binders have a good time. Continental novels are always in their five hundredth thousand.

BREAKFAST.—There is no breakfast on the Continent, but Englishmen order two eggs.

BRIGANDS.—These are no longer the picturesque fully-armed ruffians who lurked in woods and lived in caves and held you up to ransom ; but they still exist in large numbers, wearing frock-coats or tail-coats and managing hotels.

CABMEN.—Since the introduction of the taximeter, these enemies of Society are less dangerous than they were ; but the traveller who

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cares for peace and quiet still gives them all his small change too.

CHANNEL CROSSING.—Now that the three railway systems that convey us to France have combined and competition has vanished, we must await the construction of the Channel Tunnel with more fortitude than ever. Meanwhile, in wet weather only the very strongest should dare the journey.

All the interest in the comfort of their passengers that is shown by the railway company between London and the harbour, disappears directly the harbour is reached. From that moment the elements are allowed to take charge.

The complaint against inventors, that they spend their time and ingenuity on the wrong things, is never found to be so just as on Channel crossings. The want of protection from the weather ; the want of system in embarking and disembarking the passengers ; the want of system in embarking and disembarking their personal luggage ; the want of any order in the Custom-House rooms on either side, so that they are now like the Rugby scrum ; the want of cabin doors that will remain shut or open ;

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the want of machinery that will take the boat direct into Boulogne harbour instead of pausing outside to turn, often in the worst sea ; in short, the want of consideration for anyone on board except the officers, is a continual scandal.

Take the matter of gangways alone. Surely there could be many ? But no, the harder it rains, the more, I have observed, do the officials cling to the tradition of the single gangway. Few sights are more depressing than the first glimpse of a rough sea in a gale, as one gets it from the train at Folkestone and Dover. But there is one sight that is even more miserable and provocative of that sinking feeling, and that is the solitary crowded gangway, slippery and set at an angle of forty-five degrees, by which all the thousand passengers have slowly and uncomfortably to gain the ship.

I don't wish to be a spoil-sport, but I think the porters on both sides of the Channel, covered with bags and alpenstocks, for carrying which they are going to be far too heavily paid, get too much pleasure in using indiscriminately the steps from the top deck to the lower. Not only going down, but up. Couldn't an order be issued making these steps "one-way" ?

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And what about the immense distance, without any protection from the weather, from the steamers to that inhospitable row of benches presided over by the amiable gentlemen who refuse to accept an Englishman's word? I am thinking in particular of Dover, but the height of discomfort seems to have been aimed at in all the ports. At the end of a bad crossing, to be again exposed to the elements after what we have the right to think of as dry land is reached, can be the final ordeal, and then to have our bags rummaged for a shilling's worth of *Eau de Cologne*!

Let there be a Channel Tunnel, and let it be soon!

CHICKEN.—The chicken—in all its manifestations, young, old, male, female and egg—is the Continent's best friend. In England it is still something of a state dish, and you will ask for it in vain at more inns than not; but on the Continent no *auberge* or *trattoria* is too small to produce either a *poulet* or a *pollo*, with an omelette to precede it.

“O hen,” I should say, were I a poet in the mood for an ode—“O hen, we don't much admire your silly face; we are ashamed of your greed; we are pained when you run

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away and refuse to be friendly ; we hate the noise you make ; we hate even more the noise that your husband makes ; but we can't get on without you. You can always be relied upon to fill a gap, one way or another. We like you roasted, we like you grilled, we like you spatchcocked, we don't in the least agree that ' a chicken boiled is a chicken spoiled ' ; we think that without assistance from you a *risotto* wouldn't be worth having. Many a time and oft, after a long day's tramp or a mountain ascent, or even a motor run, you have saved our lives. You come to the rescue when beef is tough and mutton underdone, and even more so when there is no meat in the house. For you have the priceless merit of adjacency. Other food has to be bespoken, but there you are !

“ And, O hen, your fruit ! What should we do without eggs ? It is an excitement to find them, it is a joy to eat them. We like them boiled (four minutes for mine), we like them fried, we like them poached ; best of all we like them with bacon. But bacon is better at home, O hen, than on the Continent. In France they call it *lard* (the shame !) and are

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sparing with it; in Italy they call it *lardo* and are even more sparing of it. For eggs and bacon as they should be, England is the only place. In Holland they know about them but serve them too dry. "Yes, O hen, O chicken, for you in all your manifestations, we must seek the Continent!"

Thus, were I a poet, I should sing. But I am no poet, and so you must either be left unsung or the service must be performed by Mr. Yeats (who won the Nobel Prize for less), or Mr. Bridges (who invented the Great Silence), by Mr. A. E. Housman or Mr. Kipling, by Mr. Binyon or Mr. de la Mare, by Mr. Squire or Sir Henry Newbolt.

CHURCHES.—English travellers on the Continent are liable to severe shocks of surprise on finding that the churches are open all day and every day. It is even possible here and there to enter the chancel of a cathedral without having to pay a fee.

CIVILIZATION (FAILURE OF).—See Channel Crossing.

CLARET.—This beverage on the Continent is served stone cold, unless you particularly ask that it should be warmed.

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COLLARS.—No scientific man or philosopher has ever yet been able to explain why the button-hole at the back of a Continental collar is horizontal, while that of an English collar is vertical. A man can become an F.R.S. and still have no theory as to this astonishing disparity.

COMIC PAPERS.—Continental comic papers have the same pictures every week, and, even if the words underneath them are changed, it is the same joke. Were there no underclothes there would be no comic papers.

CONCIERGE.—Whatever fluctuations may occur in the government of the countries of Europe—though Kings or Kaisers fall and anarchy reigns—the concierge will still be in control. Nothing can shake the power either of him or his wife. They sit at the door by day and move their bed to the door by night. They see all and hear all. They know who enters the house and who leaves it. They cannot be put off with falsehoods. If they don't like you they can make your life a burden; and, if they don't dislike you they can do so too. Money can placate but never buy them.

CONSULS.—No one has ever seen one of these

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elusive creatures. The most he has seen is an underling who is sorry the Consul isn't in and can't say when he will return.

CORRIDOR.—This is the part of a Continental train reserved for those passengers to whom, as they stand conversing or looking at the scenery, it comes always as a shock, very reluctantly realized, that other persons should want to pass.

COURIERS.—A courier is a man whose profession it is to look out slower trains and engage worse rooms than anybody else.

CROUPIERS.—Men in black coats and black moustaches who have never been to bed.

CUSTOMS-HOUSE.—A Customs-House is a place where otherwise scrupulously truthful men say they have nothing to declare. When the officer finds their cigars they say that their fool of a servant must have packed them against orders ; but as they cannot speak the language the officer does not understand, and if he did he would not believe it.

DISCOMFORT—See Channel Crossing.

ELEMENTS (EXPOSURE TO). — See Channel Crossing.

EXPENSES.—These are always rather more

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than three times what you had calculated they would be.

FOREIGNERS.—It is a great shock to many English people on the Continent to find that they are foreigners ; but it rarely causes them to revise their opinion of those creatures on returning home.

GUIDES (DAY).—Day Guides are elderly men with appealing eyes and baggy umbrellas who know the year when Raphael was born.

GUIDES (NIGHT).—Night Guides should be avoided.

ILLNESS.—It is very unwise to have an illness on the Continent. Nothing is so resented there as sickness and especially the sickness of a foreigner.

INTERPRETERS.—Interpreters are known as such because the word “Interpreter” is on their caps ; otherwise you might think of them as almost anything but linguists. They are useful as buffers between you and the rapacity of porters and cabmen ; but in the end it costs you more.

INVENTORS, THEIR MISDIRECTED INDUSTRY.
—See Channel Crossing.

LANDING-TICKET.—The piece of cardboard that you lose while you are being sea-sick.

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LIQUEURS.—It is possible on the Continent to be given over-measure of old brandy or other liqueurs and not be charged for it. Nothing of the kind has ever happened in England.

LUNCH.—This is the best meal of the day. It can begin as early as eleven and last till three.

MOSQUITOES.—Flying insects with a damnably poisonous bite which every one except hotel-managers has seen, heard and suffered from.

MOSQUITO-NETS. — Superfluous protections against mosquitoes which are “absolutely unnecessary, but you can, of course, have one if you insist.”

MUSIC-HALLS.—In England and America the music-hall is popular, largely because the performance, having begun at the advertised hour, goes on without a break, or with one interval of very brief duration, till the end. In the Continental music-hall there is a considerable pause after every turn, and in the middle of the evening so long a pause that one wonders if the band or the scene-shifters have struck.

In Austria and Germany the music-hall audience on the ground floor and in the boxes

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dine during the performance ; the others drink beer.

In Italian music-halls few people listen and there is no applause, but a performer now and then learns from the decreased volume of cat-calls and hisses that he has displeased the audience less than most.

In Italian music-halls a popular song is sometimes sung as often as three times in one evening by different singers, which indicates how lightly the Italian showmen take their task. Such a lapse in England or America would turn a manager's shirt-front black.

OFFICERS.—Nothing is so astonishing about the Continental officer that you see in the streets and cafés as the friends he is with.

OLD MASTERS.—Although London has the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection, Londoners look at Old Masters only when they are on the Continent.

OYSTERS.—English people, accustomed to oysters that are dead and dry and very dear, are surprised to find that Continental oysters are often cheap and are always served fresh and alive, in the deep shell, with their juice still in them.

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PASSPORTS.—Largely obsolete documents which, in spite of this widely advertised obsolescence, you must still line up in a queue on each side of the Channel to display to officials who don't look at them.

PAVEMENTS.—Pavements on the Continent are used not only for people to walk on but as dining-rooms.

PLATES.—When these articles are judged to be sufficiently cold, hot meat is served on them.

PLATFORMS.—There are no railway platforms on the Continent, with the result that every passenger must also be a mountaineer.

PORTERS (HOTEL).—Hotel porters come from Switzerland and never go back. They are big and blond and speak English, and are so wealthy as to be superior to tips. They are always on duty, always smart, and they can attend politely to ten people at once, draft a telegram, look out a train, change a five-pound note, ring up the occupant of a room and tell you also what hour a theatre begins, all at the same time. If they remained in Switzerland, Switzerland would be the leading country of the world.

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PORTERS (RAILWAY).—Continental porters, besides being dressed in blue, differ from ours also in their disdain of barrows. English porters rejoice to keep us waiting while they “fetch a barrow,” and as at all the great stations, by some careful arrangement by the general manager of the line, there is only one barrow to every ten porters, we are often kept waiting for a very long time. While an English porter is fetching a barrow the Continental porter has produced a strap and is binding your luggage together preparatory either to lifting it to his shoulder or crawling underneath and gradually rising more or less erect with it all over him, according to the weight. It is nothing for a Continental porter to carry in this way, by one strap, one innovation trunk, three portmanteaux, two kit-bags, a dressing-case, a tea-basket and a pair of skis.

POSTE-RESTANTE.—This is the department in Continental post-offices where travellers’ letters are kept from the traveller by casual clerks smoking cigarettes. All Continental post-offices are run mainly in the interests of the tobacco trade, but in no department is smoking so steady. It is possible to believe the hotel

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porter who says there is no letter for you, but one never has confidence in the thoroughness of the *Poste-restante* attendant.

POSTMEN.—An English postman never under any provocation advances beyond the front-door mat, but on the Continent a postman with a registered letter enters your bedroom and wakes you up and produces an ink-pot and pen in order to get your signature.

PROGRESS (WANT OF).—See Channel Crossing.

QUEUES.—No true European respects the queue, even though it has a French name. The last to arrive often sees to it that he is the first served.

RACE MEETINGS.—At Continental race meetings there is complete silence until the horses are near the winning-post or a jockey is thrown at a water-jump. Bookmakers do not exist, and you may leave your field-glasses on a chair confident that they will remain there. On the other hand, *pari-mutuel* prices are very small and you don't get your stake back.

SALTSPoons.—There are no saltspoons on the Continent.

SECRETS.—The principal secret of travellers on the Continent, and particularly in Paris,

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is the name of “the best little restaurant you ever dreamed of—simple, I admit, but with the most wonderful wine and cooking.” But when you reach it, it has either disappeared, changed hands, or “gone down.”

SILENCE.—There is no silence so profound as that which envelops you when a Continental train stops in the small hours.

SLEEPING-CARS.—The sleeping-cars, known in France as *wagon-lits*, in Spain as *wagon-camas*, in Italy as *carrozze di letto* and in Germany as *schlaf wagen*, are possible only if you are rich enough to secure a whole compartment for yourself. You may then arrange your luggage, undress and dress with some degree of comfort. The trouble about them is that they have nearly always been engaged by other people ; and it is, of course, other people who are the traveller's cross. At every turn he is up against them. For if you are fortunate enough to get a berth it is made intolerable by the man who occupies the one below you. If you get a whole compartment you have to hear the other people washing. They are always washing when you want to wash, and there are no more towels. Also they are always

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having their beds made when you want yours to be made. Conductors of *wagon-lits* always do more for other people than for you.

Only very strong people should travel by *wagon-lit*, because you have to push your luggage through the window.

Wagon-lits have more buttons and switches than anyone has ever discovered the meaning of. Just as dawn comes you find the one that turns on the light. *Wagon-lits* are divided into two berths, upper and lower. Hospitals are full of travellers who have tried to get into the upper.

Wagon-lits have no ventilation, but there is a little window at the top that admits the smuts.

SPRINGS.—The things which ought to be under your *wagon-lit* but have perished.

STATIONS.—Mysterious places where one wakes up in the *wagon-lit* and hears the brakes sigh.

STRING.—The tenuous substance with which Italian porters tie up trunks and bags that are already safely closed and locked.

STUPIDITY.—See Channel Crossing.

SUGAR.—Were it sweet, sugar on the Continent might be excellent.

Encounters and Diversions

THEATRES.—Theatres on the continent differ from ours in being very difficult to get into. Here the managers welcome patrons, but there they set them the task of getting past three men in top-hats in the lobby, whose duty and joy it is to take away your ticket and discuss it together. After a while, unless they dislike you very much, they give you another, which several other persons have to see before it passes into the hands of an elderly woman of forbidding aspect who consents to show you your place only on the receipt of a bribe. As, when you are really in the theatre the play is in a language that you can't understand and probably had much better not understand, it is better to sit over dinner.

TICKET COLLECTOR.—The man who never wants to see your ticket unless you are asleep.

TRAMS.—Unless the street is too narrow for tram lines, many Continental municipalities do not lay them. They then fit the tramcars with bells and tell the drivers never to stop clanging.

WAGON-RESTAURANTS.—There is no meal on a visit to the Continent so good as that in the first *wagon-restaurant*. Afterwards they deterio-

The Continental Dictionary

rate. They are staffed entirely by ex-jugglers. No tip has yet been produced large enough to persuade the chief official to let you change your seat. There is a point on the line between Calais and Boulogne where the curve is so sharp that you always get the next man's soup.

WAITERS.—Waiters are the principal inhabitants of the Continent. There are in the cities a few people not in evening dress by day, and in the country one is aware now and then of a peasant ; but waiters are everywhere. They rise with the lark and retire with the owl, and in the interim never sit down.

WAITERS (WINE).—On the Continent the wine waiter does not have to be sent for, but is at your side as you sit down.

WINDOWS.—Things which “il est dangereux de se pencher au dehors” and “pericoloso sporgersi,” Also from which, in Germany, there must be no outside-leaning.

WIVES.—Wives are useful on the Continent because they learnt French and Italian and German at school, and their husbands didn't.

The Critic



IN the days when I used to write poetry I had a literary friend who wrote short stories intended for the magazines, and we dined at the same chop-house not very far from Piccadilly Circus. That was a long while ago, before motor-cars, before cinemas, before tubes, when few people had the telephone and none the gramophone. And yet we did very well. When we could afford it we jingled home in a hansom, now and then exchanging a joke through the roof with the cabman, which no one has ever done with a taxi-driver. And though there was no cinema there was Elizabeth Ann Bellwood singing at the Tivoli, or Paul Cinquevalli juggling at the Pavilion, and Wyndham was at the Criterion and Irving at the Lyceum, and Regent Street stood.

The peculiarity of our chop-house was the extreme deliberation of the waiters. There were only two, and if it were possible for either

The Critic

of them to be slower than the other, he was. It was only on the understanding that you, so to speak, accepted their tardiness that you were served at all ; but once having established yourself as a customer you remained. There is something hypnotic in leisurely processes : you were drugged ; but there were such positive advantages too, as the excellence of the food when it did arrive, the excellence of the beer, the sweet reasonableness of the charges, and the fun of watching [strangers, unaware of the special guarded character of the place, getting angrier and angrier, and at last flinging out. In a word, if you were going to the theatre, it was the worst eating-place in London ; if you wanted to talk, it was the best.

I remember one evening awaiting Mark, as I will call him, with no little excitement, because I had just finished a poem and I thought sufficiently well of it to wish for his praise.

“ I wanted to see you,” I said. “ I’ve written some verses which I rather think you’ll like. About dreams,” and I took the manuscript out of my pocket.

“ Talking of dreams,” he said. “ I’ve just finished a story about one. Very odd you should

Encounters and Diversions

have brought it to my mind like that. I should like to tell you about it. In fact, I happen to have the first draft with me, and we might see if we can't improve it while we eat."

I placed rather carefully beside my plate the sheet of paper on which my poem was written. "It's astonishing," I said, "what trouble even a short lyric can give one! No one reading this"—and I tapped it—"would believe that I spent three hours on one of the four stanzas."

"I don't know," he said. "I always feel that rhymes help you. Now, in writing a story you get no help. The art of the short story is one of the most difficult to master. But I flatter myself——" Here he disappeared for a few moments behind a tankard—"I flatter myself I'm getting near it. This story"—he deposited his exhibit on the table too—"this story is about a man who dreams futures. He lives in a village and has got a terrific reputation for his gift. You go to him and impress your personality on him in some way——"

"If you've got one," I suggested.

"Yes; don't interrupt, please. Of course, if you've got one. And then he dreams about you. Well, my story is about one of these

The Critic

dreams. A girl goes to him and he dreams a future for her, and she can't frustrate it. It's very uncanny. In fact"—he glanced at himself in a mirror with some satisfaction—"I can't think how I thought of it. 'We are greater than we know'—how does the line go? Anyway, it's about this girl that I think you might possibly be able to help . . ."

I won't bother you with any more of the story. Suffice it to say that Mark was still picking my brains when we suddenly realized how late it was and hurried off just in time to see Harry Pleon, who came on that week at the Pavilion at 10.35.

The next time we met, at the same place, I had a triumph to display: my poem had been accepted and I had the evening paper containing it in my pocket.

"This is the dream-lyric I wanted to show you a week or so ago," I said.

He read it:—

ALTRUISM.

My nights among the dead are past;
When sleep at last is here
Into my dreams come thronging fast
The friends of yesteryear.

Encounters and Diversions

They share the wild absurdities
That mark the dreamer's track,
Caprice controls their entrances ;
But ah ! I've brought them back.

Nor I nor they display surprise,
Familiar is their shape ;
I wonder if they realize
And relish their escape ?

If so, then let us sleep the more,
To help them, over there—
Our friends not lost but gone before—
To constant change of air.

“Not bad,” he said as he handed the paper
back. “I like it better than when you showed
it me first.”

Friendship's Offering ∞ ∞ ∞

IT was in those careless far-off days when we were all beginning, and were pledged to do what we could for each other, that we used to meet at the Gate House on Hampstead Heath (where knives and forks used by Dick Turpin were kept in a glass case), and, either in one of the arbours, or upstairs, according to the weather, compared notes and planned campaigns.

It is of one of the more shameless of those campaigns that I would tell.

Among us was one whom I will call Tommy Ridler (now an illustrious publicist). To him Fortune had been less kind than to some of us, and he had got not even one toe on the ladder ; nothing that he wrote was accepted.

As I have said, we were all pledged to help each other, and on the evening that I am recalling, Dick Struthers (also now well known by another name), who had just come back from a holiday

Encounters and Diversions

on the Norfolk Broads, was talking about the birds there.

"Now, take the corncrake," he said. "That's a rum 'un if you like. It makes a row all day and half the night, and no one's ever seen one yet."

"Nonsense," said I. "They have them in museums."

"Maybe," he said. "But museums don't count."

"Still they had to be stuffed," I said. I was argumentative in those days.

"Taxidermists don't count either," said Dick. "Speaking generally, no one has ever seen a corncrake. Jolly interesting, isn't it?"

Even I agreed.

"Look here, Tommy," he went on, "why don't you mug up the corncrake in some book and write about it. That's the kind of thing editors like: facts about a mystery, even if the mystery's only a blooming bird. Give your inventive powers a rest for a few minutes and try information for a change."

And Tommy did so. He found out all about the corncrake, otherwise known as landrail, one of the *Rallidæ*, the *Rallus crex* of Linnæus, and all the rest of it. He dug out of the classics

Friendship's Offering

the legend that it was the corncrake or landrail that was the *Ortygometra* which led the quail on its voyages. He described its self-protective colouring (see Mimicry in Nature); its ventriloquial powers, so that you never know in which direction it is; its haunts; its eggs, usually eleven in number, laid in a nest in the long grass; and the whole bag of tricks. And what is more, he got the article accepted.

There it was, in our favourite hunting-ground for guineas, *The Globe and Traveller*: "The mysterious Corncrake—From a Correspondent." Not a "Turnover"—Tommy's style was not flexible enough for that—but an inside column.

"Splendid!" said Dick when he heard the news. "Now we must get busy and rub this in. Tommy's future as the popular ornithologist must be made."

"Is ornithology a necessity?" Tommy pathetically inquired. "You've no notion how I loathe birds."

"Of course," said Dick, "you must continue as you have begun. You must be identified in the public mind with our feathered friends. Specialisation, you know. That's the art of success."

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And he outlined the campaign.

During the week the Editor of *The Globe and Traveller* received the following missives :—

THE LAURELS,
TUNBRIDGE WELLS.

DEAR SIR,—My husband, who is a well-known medical man and amateur ornithologist, is deeply interested in the article on the Corncrake which you printed last week. He would much like to be put in touch with the author, if that is permissible, and he hopes that you will be able to give us more of his admirable work.

I am,
Yours faithfully,
SELINA PARRISH.

107 TRUMPINGTON STREET,
CAMBRIDGE.

DEAR SIR,—You have, if you will allow me to say so, discovered a real treasure in the contributor who writes on the Corncrake. I have rarely read anything more fascinating than his account of that strangely elusive bird. It would be a boon to me personally if you would invite him to give you a series of articles on other of our stranger birds, such as the wood-

Friendship's Offering

cock, the snipe and, say, the hawk family, of which too little is known.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

MARCUS GROW.

THE NOOK,

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

DEAR SIR,—You can't think what a pleasure you gave to my family and myself by that article on the Corncrake. If only there was less about politics and divorce and police and more about nature, how much sweeter would the papers be! Please get this fascinating Correspondent to write again.

Yours sincerely,

AGATHA THORN.

8 LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

DEAR SIR,—Kindly forward the enclosed letter to your Correspondent on the Corncrake. It is not written to attempt to lure him from your literary staff, but to congratulate him on a first-class piece of work and wish him health and strength to continue.

Yours faithfully,

AMBROSE HEARTY.

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ST. FRANCIS'S COLLEGE,
EASTBOURNE.

DEAR SIR,—Your article on the Corncrake is just what we want in school, and I hope you will have more. My boys are all keen on birds.

Believe me,

Yours faithfully,

HENRY SWIFT.

UNITED SERVICE CLUB, S.W.

DEAR SIR,—I shall be grateful if you would kindly favour me with the name and address of your correspondent who writes on the Corncrake. I am preparing a work on migratory birds and should much value the assistance of his knowledge and literary skill.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

(Lieut.-Colonel) HUGO DUNDAS.

SEA-SCENT,

BOURNEMOUTH.

DEAR SIR,—Speaking with my uncle, the Vicar of Dewfield, the other day, he said that, in a long experience as a reader of ornithological books and articles, he could not remember a more informing or interesting paper than that in

Friendship's Offering

a recent number on the Corncrake. The Vicar is now in his eightieth year and very feeble in everything but intellect, and it would be a kind act on your part to arrange for further articles by the same writer as a solace to his declining days.

I am,

Yours faithfully.

LUCY SPEARING.

Need I add that all those letters and many more were written by Tommy's four friends either the same evening or during the next few days, and arrangements made with friends or relations for the postmarks to be correct? Not bad, were they? One even was written by the disgraceful hand of Tommy himself. Can you guess which? The last. Oh, Tommy!

But the sad thing is, they didn't take the Editor in.

A Romance of To-morrow ∞ ∞

MANY years ago, when I first came to London, I saw a good deal of a man named Purvis. He was about thirty—older than any of us, round, bearded, jocular, imperturbable, and apparently he lived like the lilies. He kept no hours, was always on hand if anyone was being festive, and the fair fame of literature, English or French, seemed to be in his keeping. His talk was always of books and authors, and there was a rumour that he was a writer himself. It was this rumour—unsupported, I must admit, by any evidence—that gave him his place in our respect; for the young who are themselves thinking of plying the precarious pen look with dilated eyes upon those who have already achieved print.

One day—it must have been in 1892—he confided to me that he had the most wonderful idea for a novel and was about to draw up the

A Romance of To-morrow

scenario. Other ideas had come to him before but they had been disappointing ; this was the real thing. This was what, he now knew, he had been saving himself for ; this was terrific. If henceforward I saw less of him than usual I should know the reason : he would be wrestling with the plot, endeavouring to control the mighty primeval forces that were being let loose. For this was to be a human drama of the fiercest elemental passions : a tragedy of the countryside. The provisional title was *Herodias Valling*. He would say no more about it then, he added, but from time to time he might ; although it was a mistake to talk about what one was projecting.

A little later I received an invitation to attend at Purvis's rooms one evening to join in the ceremony of laying the foundation-page of a new novel. For, as he argued when we were all assembled, why should not the beginnings of works of art be celebrated just as much as buildings ? With more propriety, surely, for a work of art may live for ever, whereas buildings fall into ruin. He would ask us all to drink to the prosperity of the sheet of paper on the table. A number of bottles of champagne, not

Encounters and Diversions

a very good brand—and champagne, anyway, no matter of what vintage, is a hateful beverage between meals—were then released ; we filled our glasses ; we lifted them ; our host turned over the sheet of paper, revealing the title, *Herodias Valling*, a tragic novel, by Rutland Purvis ; and we drank the masterpiece's health.

Purvis then lit a pipe and told us the plot. Like all jovial facetious men, he had a leaning towards the melancholy and macabre, and this story was one of unrelieved gloom. From early childhood Herodias's surroundings were sinister. The house was half ruined ; creditors were always threatening ; her step-father never spoke ; her mother only whimpered ; nettles and deadly nightshade overran the garden ; owls occupied the attics.

But Herodias managed to grow in this dismal environment into a girl of surpassing loveliness. From this point onwards the story bore (to my mind) too close a resemblance to a much-discussed novel of the day, by a practised hand, called *Tess of the d'Urbevilles*, on which we had all heard Purvis express himself again and again, usually with unstinted appreciation.

As he continued the outline he became more

A Romance of To-morrow

and more moved ; his voice broke, his eyes filled with tears ; and at the end, when Herodias committed suicide in a gravel-pit, he was a wreck. It was a very uncomfortable and impressive moment, and we all avoided each other's gaze and found ourselves thinking of Purvis with renewed and deepened respect. There must, we realized, be something very fine underneath that mask of levity. All the same, I couldn't forget *Tess*.

Although we sat on for some time, for there were still bottles to empty, Purvis never recovered his natural gaiety, and when he said Good-night and received our best wishes once more, he pressed our hands with almost painful gratitude and understanding. Henceforth, we felt, we were to be in this great work too, and were his collaborators in the tragedy which was to dissolve England in grief.

The next time I saw Purvis he was his normal self. It was on my tongue to make a reference to the great work, but I checked the impulse ; I felt that so grave a subject should be introduced by the author or not at all. Purvis talked of everything else, and we went to Lord's.

The next time I saw him he said that the

Encounters and Diversions

distractions of London were fatal to the development of great tragic themes and he was going to the country, to be solitary, where he might give his imagination rein and work out his drama in uninterrupted peace. Such a book needed seclusion. Perhaps, when he had broken the back of it, I would come down and see him ?

I said I would, and a few months later I went down. He was in Sussex, and he met me at the station as merry and debonair as ever, with the usual big pipe. I must be prepared, he said on the way, for the people I was to meet, for he was living *en famille* with a farmer and his daughters, two very nice girls. Miss Esther and Miss Kate.

“ And the novel ? ” I asked.

“ I’ll tell you about that,” he said, “ later.”

Anything less like the hermitage that he had proposed to flee to, anything less like a lodge in the wilderness, I never saw than Gleesome’s Farm. The farmer was a sly humourist who made Purvis a constant butt ; the daughters were jolly tomboys. Our dinner was one long laugh. Purvis had a sitting-room of his own, but it would be more sociable, he said, to be with the others ; so after dinner we played “ Snap ” and

A Romance of To-morrow

“ Families ” and other childish games till it was time for bed. “ Time for bed,” when Purvis was in London, was a phrase without meaning, but now he yawned and lit my candle.

After breakfast the next day I said I would go for a walk so that Purvis might get on with his work, but he said he would come too. On the walk he told me again the plot of *Herodias Valling*, and again became emotional over it ; but when I asked if he had not some chapters that I might see, he said that so far he had done very little. The moment had not arrived. “ One must wait,” he said, “ in matters of this kind, till the clock strikes.”

All that was thirty or more years ago, and I completely lost sight of him. Either he did not return to London or our lives ceased to cross. But last week I met him again. He was older, grey, less jaunty ; but I knew him at once.

“ I’ve been looking for that novel all this time,” I said. “ But if it has come out under its original title I’ve missed it.”

“ Fancy your remembering ! ” he said. “ No, it hasn’t been published yet. I’m still at work on it. One mustn’t hurry a thing like that.”

The Bottle's Progress ♪ ♪ ♪

(With pictorial assistance from Mr. Frank Reynolds)

ALL adventurous amateurs of London, and especially the young, have a period in their lives when there is no excitement equal to the discovery of a new and remarkable Soho restaurant. It may be French, it may be Italian, and it is sometimes Spanish; but whatever their alleged nationality all are alike in being extraordinarily good and extraordinarily cheap, and "For heaven's sake, old man, keep it to yourself, because if you tell every one, the place will be ruined!"

Another peculiarity which these little restaurants share, and which is not perhaps an advantage, is the absence of a licence, so that all wine has to be fetched from a neighbouring shop or public-house.

It was in one of these restaurants (the name of which I would not give away under any con-

The Bottle's Progress

sideration) that I was sitting when two young men entered and sat down at a neighbouring table. Mine was by the window commanding the street ; theirs was farther in.

I had no need to strain my ears to learn that the host was of the centre, and the guest a beginner in Bohemia.

Having ordered the food they came to the question of the wine.

" You like St. Emilion ? " the host asked.

Yes, he liked St. Emilion.

" You always get good St. Emilion in Soho," said the host. " We'll have a bottle. Warms you."

He chose a brand and paid for it—for that, as you know, is the rule in these places—and a young waiter in old evening clothes was sent off to get it.

" Be careful with it," the host called out.

" Yessir," said the boy.

" A mistake to shake good claret," the host explained to his friend.

" Is it ? Yes, of course," said the friend, and they settled down to confidential talk, which I neither heard nor wanted to hear.

It was then that the cinema operator should

Encounters and Diversions

have begun to turn his handle, for this, as I could see through the window, is what occurred.

The young waiter entered the public-house at the corner and came out with the bottle, holding it like this :—



The Bottle's Progress

At this moment he met a friend, also a waiter, from another marvellous little restaurant on



the same errand, and the friend took the bottle and examined it, holding it with equal negligence.

Encounters and Diversions

As the two youths parted, the second of them gave the first a friendly blow and ran away, and our waiter pursued, brandishing the bottle on high like a club.

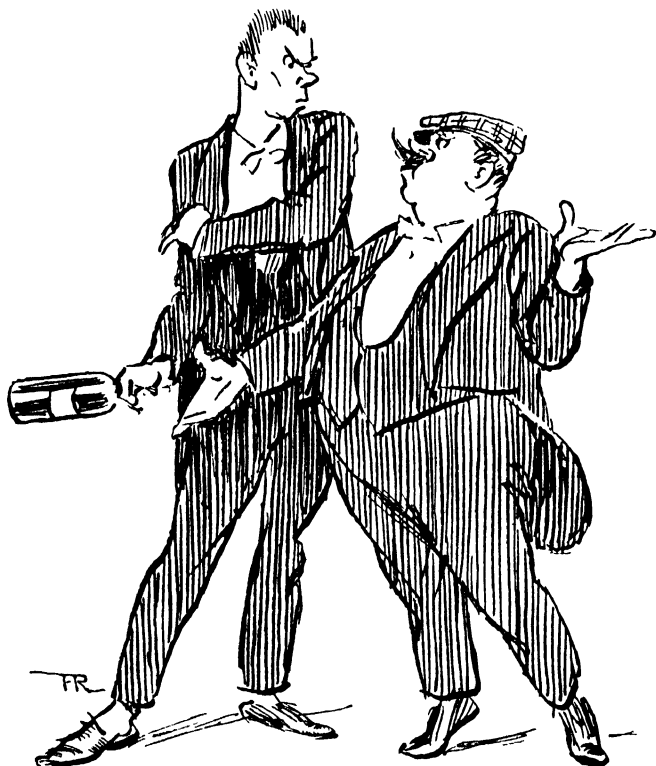


The chase ended at the public-house door, when our waiter again turned homewards.

He was nearly home when still another waiter,

The Bottle's Progress

bent on the same errand and obviously in a hurry, arrived and, glancing at the bottle and seeing that it was the same brand that he too had

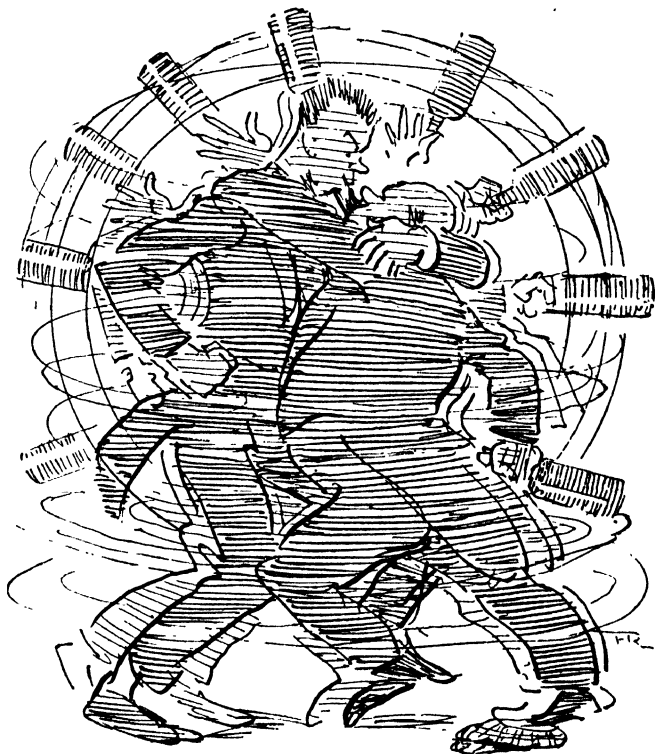


been sent for, asked to be allowed to have it. I could not, of course, hear, but they came both of gesticulating parents, and the conversation

Encounters and Diversions

was as plain as though spoken to me. "I'm in a hurry and you're not," his hands distinctly said.

Our waiter, however, very properly refused to relinquish the bottle, whereupon the other



seized it, and a terrific battle for its possession set in, which, with a terrific wrench, our waiter

The Bottle's Progress

won. He then slipped into the restaurant and behind the *caisse*, where the bottle was uncorked and otherwise dealt with. And this is how it emerged—



The host sipped the wine critically. "Excellent!" he said. "Perfect condition."

Joe



*From Stephen Dunk, farmer and churchwarden, to
Mr. Septimus Rose, scholar and recluse, the new
tenant of The Grange, Pulham*

DEAR SIR,—We should be grateful if you
would give something in aid of the Pulham
bellringers.

I am,

Yours obediently,

STEPHEN DUNK

Mr. Septimus Rose to Mr. Stephen Dunk

Mr. Septimus Rose is not a lover of church
bells, which, of course, should have disappeared
when clocks and watches became cheap ; but,
since the custom of ringing them persists, he
encloses a ten-shilling note.

Mr. Stephen Dunk to Mr. Septimus Rose

DEAR SIR,—I beg to thank you for your
subscription to the bellringers. I note what
you say about clocks, but I would respectfully

Joe

point out that whereas clocks and watches are often fast or slow, the Pulham bells keep time. I can promise your ears some rare treats on practice nights as well as on Sundays.

I am,

Yours obediently,

STEPHEN DUNK

Mr. Septimus Rose to Mr. Stephen Dunk

Mr. Septimus Rose would like the leader of the bellringers to know that last evening's practice, so far from being a rare treat, was notable for a very obnoxious discord causing him to regret having made any contribution to the funds.

Mr. Stephen Dunk to Mr. Septimus Rose

DEAR SIR,—With reference to your letter about the ringing, all I can say is that I am the leader and that I think it must have been Joe Grover; but you must kindly remember that Joe is new to the bells and unless he practises he'll never learn. We all do our best, but in the nature of things Wednesday evenings can't be as perfect as Sundays. A nicer lad than Joe doesn't breathe, as you, Sir, would be the first to agree if you met him. If you

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will kindly have patience you will soon have no cause to complain again. I have the honour to be

Yours obediently,

STEPHEN DUNK

Mr. Septimus Rose to Mr. Stephen Dunk

Mr. Septimus Rose is perfectly willing to take Joe Grover's merits as a lad on hearsay, but his ringing is atrocious. Mr. Rose suggests that for a few weeks Joe practises in some other village.

Mr. Stephen Dunk to Mr. Septimus Rose

DEAR SIR,—With reference to your further letter about poor Joe, I am afraid you do not quite appreciate the position. It is one thing to practise with your own ringers and quite another to practise with strangers. In point of fact, Joe would be useless to our peal if he practised anywhere but at Pulham, and, if I may be allowed to say so, Sir, we must all learn. Joe will be a fine ringer one of these days, he has the strength and he has the will.

I am,

Yours obediently,

STEPHEN DUNK

Joe

Mr. Septimus Rose to Mr. Stephen Dunk

To Mr. Dunk's last letter, Mr. Septimus Rose would say that when he settled in Pulham it was for peace and quiet, and he gave his subscription to the bellringers because he considered himself one of the community. He did not then know, as he now does, that bellringing is a disease here. The "rare treats" that his ears were promised have been nothing but assaults. In his opinion bellringing should be kept for Sunday, although he is convinced that Sunday also is better without it. If Mr. Dunk will arrange to confine all ringing to Sundays Mr. Rose will increase his subscription to a pound.

Mr. Stephen Dunk to Mr. Septimus Rose

DEAR SIR,—With reference to your letter about practice and ringing on Sundays only, I am sorry to say it is impossible. The week-day practice has been going on for years, maybe for centuries, and such an ancient and honourable custom could not be tampered with on any account, and certainly not for ten shillings. Moreover, the inhabitants, many of which have lived here a long time, have come to expect it. I am sorry, but there it is.

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And another thing, Sir, how could we promise to ring only on Sundays when there are such things as weddings, which are nothing without a peal, and funerals, where tolling is expected? In fact much of our practising is done for weddings, which is the only time when we get something extra for ourselves.

No, Sir, I am sorry, but we can't change the practice day. I think you'll find a difference next Wednesday evening. Joe is coming along nicely.

I have the honour to be,

Yours obediently,

STEPHEN DUNK

Mr. Joseph Grover to Mr. Septimus Rose

DERE SIR if you will give to me the ten bob instead of to the others I will send in my resignashun.

Yours truely,

JOSEPH GROVER

Mr. Stephen Dunk to Mr. Septimus Rose

DEAR SIR,—With reference to your letter about the choir practice, I hasten to inform you that you are not likely to be troubled again, as Joe has retired. We shall miss the lad, for

Joe

he was willing and regular, but he says he was never sure that ringing was his true calling, and so he is joining the choir, having a fair baritone voice. We are trying young Horace Peters in Joe's place, with hopes for the best, but I am afraid he will take a lot of training. From your point of view I expect it is a pity Joe left.

I have the honour to be,

Yours obediently,

STEPHEN DUNK

59,654 ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

I WONDER how many people could guess without any assistance what the number at the head of this article signifies. I believe it would be safe even for me to offer a large monetary prize to anyone providing a correct answer.

I have put it to all kinds of persons and they have hazarded ingenious theories.

"I know," said one man instantly: "it's your ticket in the Calcutta Sweep."

"No," I said.

"It's something to do with Reparations," said another.

"No," I said.

"It's too high for a telephone number," said a third man.

"Yes," I said.

"And too low for your income."

I disregarded this remark.

"It might be the number of the hairs of your head," he mused.

I disregarded this too.

"It's the number of marks or crowns or roubles you got for a pound when you were in Germany or Austria or Russia," suggested another.

"No," I said.

"Well, I'm glad it's not," he replied, "because I'm so tired of that kind of talk."

It was then that I began to throw lights.
"It refers to something to eat," I said.

No one was inspired.

"You couldn't guess," I said, "unless you had been abroad."

No response.

"The number," I said, "occurs on a picture-post card."

Still no one had an idea.

"The picture," I went on, "represents an elderly man with whiskers engaged in a culinary occupation."

Their eyes remained dull.

"You," I said, pointing to the man who had been boasting that he knew Paris backwards, "doesn't that tell you?"

"No," he said sulkily.

"Then I will throw more light," I said.
"The number was written in by the successor

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of the elderly man with whiskers, and the card was then presented to me as a souvenir. Does that illumine the darkness? No? Then let me add that the scene is the oldest restaurant in Paris, and that the culinary operation is the slicing of a duck preparatory to crushing the carcass. And now you know. The duck served to me on the occasion of my last visit to the Tour d'Argent was the 59,654th."

"Of course!" they each exclaimed. "How stupid of me!"

And then we fell to the discussion of this famous resort of the epicure and the gourmet, not to mention the gourmand.

You seek the Silver Tower for the flesh of the duck—the best ducks that the fair land of France can produce, served with quintessential sauce extracted from their own bones. Some one is always carving a breast, some one is always turning the handle of a press, some one is always catching the juice, some one is always eating; everybody is always talking.

"It's an amusing place," I said, "and you ought to go there once on every visit to Paris; but it isn't so good as it used to be."

"Nothing in Paris is," said one of the company.

"For one thing," I said, "they are now putting too much lemon in the sauce. For another, they are too noisy. You see, it's a very small room, and it isn't as if your duck—I mean my duck—No. 59,654—was the only one. Far from it. While I am waiting for mine No. 59,653 is having the finishing touches put to it, and they are beginning on No. 59,655 and No. 59,656. That means that four fat men are beating up sauce in four metal dishes over four spirit-lamps all together. The din, even apart from the conversation of the guests, many of whom are strong silent Americans, is deafening. Now, I like to eat quietly. To go to the Tour d'Argent because it was founded in 1582 and has no band, and then to find it like a boiler-works, is very disconcerting. No quality of duck can compensate for that."

"The Tour d'Argent," said the man who knew Paris, "has another point of interest which renders it unique among Paris restaurants—it is always closed on Mondays."

"Why?" asked some one.

"To let the staff consult their aurists," he said.

Another Derby ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

I

*From Mr. Jonah Punt to Sir Benton Stakes, owner of
Apogee, the favourite*

May 25, 19—.

DEAR SIR,—Permit a stranger, actuated by none but the best motives, to bring some facts to your notice.

The Derby is to be run in a fortnight and you are the owner of the favourite. From all that I know of the horse, its pedigree, its form its owner, its trainer and its jockey, Apogee ought to win. The opinion of the best judges is also to this effect.

I have no doubt that you have backed the horse yourself; but even if you haven't you stand to make a large sum from the prize, and also from the possession, later on, of so valuable a sire.

Another Derby

My object in writing to you is to let you know that unless you acquire my co-operation you cannot win. No owner can win any race if I care to intervene, because my influence is irresistible. I don't go so far as to claim that my intervention can force a horse to come in first, but I do emphatically say this, that it can prevent a horse from doing so ; and it is because I want you to win the Derby with Apogee that I am writing to you now.

Briefly, you must pay me not to bet on him, because if I back him he will lose. Every horse that I back loses. But, as hope springs eternal in the human breast, I go on backing them. I am, however, prepared not to do so if you will make it worth my while. If you will send me five hundred pounds I will put a small amount on every runner but yours and keep the balance.

I adjure you to give this letter serious attention. It may look fantastic, but is not. Every horse that I back loses.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

JONAH PUNT

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II

From "The Seer's" Notes in "The Daily Wire"

The news of Apogee gets better every day and I am told that his gallop yesterday morning resembled nothing so much as streaked lightning. It will be difficult to get 2 to 1 on the day of the race.

III

From Captain Allright's Notes in "The Morning Telegram"

If ever a Derby could be said to be a cert it is the one to be run next week. Nothing but some disastrous accident can prevent Apogee from winning. The son of Apollo and Gee-whizz is probably the fastest colt that ever entered for this race.

IV

From Latest Prices

THE DERBY

Apogee evens

Another Derby

V

From Colonel Knut's Notes in "The Turf Oracle"

It would not surprise me if Apogee were to start odds on, but even then I advise my readers to bet fearlessly. We have this year such a chance to skin the pencillers as has never arisen in the chief of the Classics.

VI

From Dick Turpin's Notes in "The Evening Wire"

I am told that every man, woman and child connected with Apogee's stable is on the horse, and that Sir Benton Stakes, who invested huge amounts on the colt last autumn, when the price was long, is still backing him even at the present pinched rates. Confidence in horses has ruled high before and has been found to be misplaced; but I am prepared to put my only shirt on Apogee.

VII

Mr. Jonah Punt to Sir Benton Stakes

May 30, 19—.

DEAR SIR,—I am astonished to have received no reply to my letter of the 25th. It was a

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perfectly serious document, written in good faith, out of the wish for you to add the Blue Ribbon of the Turf to your name. I am not a blackmailer or even a beggar; I am simply your friend, who would like to have some recompense for his thoughtfulness. Five hundred pounds is nothing to a man who is about to win the Derby; to me it would be useful. And one thing is certain: if you don't pay it you can't win. There is no question whatever: horses that I back lose. I have your Derby in my hands. A speedy reply is necessary if you wish to succeed.

I am,
Yours faithfully,
JONAH PUNT

VIII

*From the Notes by "The Thunderer's" Special Racing
Correspondent*

For the great race of to-day there seems to be no necessity to look farther than Apogee. This fine speedy colt was never in better fettle, and he will start with the perfect confidence of owner, trainer and jockey. That J. Primus

Another Derby

has the mount is an additional reason for assurance. Having previously subjected, with perhaps tiresome iteration, the various candidates to the minutest examination, I need not again repeat my reasons for ruling all of them out. One no doubt will come in second, and one third. The winning horse will be Apogee.

IX

*Mr. Jonah Punt to Sir Benton Stakes, on Derby Day
Morning*

(Reply Paid Telegram)

This is your last chance to stop me. If you don't reply before noon I back Apogee.

PUNT

X

Paddock Wire, Morning of Race

Apogee is in perfect condition and cannot lose.

XI

Mr. Jonah Punt to Duggie Lurem

Apogee five shillings win.—PUNT

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XII

Every paper heading on the afternoon of the race :—

DERBY SENSATION.

OUTSIDER WINS.

APOGEE NOT PLACED.

XIII

Telegram from Mr. Jonah Punt to Sir Benton Stakes

I told you so. My bad luck is invincible.

He and She ∪ ∪ ∪ ∪

H^E. I have just heard that she is coming by the noon train. This is great news. I must go and make everything ready for her.

* * * *

Her name, the letter says, is Chloe. I don't like that. I must think of another; something attractive but short; something one can call out loud and sharply.

* * * *

"Tess," wouldn't be bad. I think I'll call her Tess.

* * * *

Yes, Tess.

* * * *

She (in the train). I wonder where I'm going. This is very uncomfortable. It shakes horribly.

* * * *

Encounters and Diversions

I hate being alone, too.

* * * *

I wish I'd been kinder to mother.

* * * *

I wonder if they've got any shooting. Mother will be disappointed if they haven't.

* * * *

Poor mother.

* * * *

He (on the platform). She's a beauty. I never saw such silky black ears, such a splendid coat.

* * * *

But she doesn't seem very friendly. Not a single wag has she given me yet.

* * * *

She. I don't care much about him ; in fact I don't like him at all. I hate having my head patted.

* * * *

I don't care for his trousers.

* * * *

Or his boots.

* * * *

He and She

His hand smells of tobacco.

* * * *

He. This is very disappointing. I was hoping for a real companion ; looking forward to it. And she's terrified of me. Won't come near. Hides under the furniture if I approach.

* * * *

Well, perhaps she's nervous from the journey—the strangeness of it all.

* * * *

She. I don't care for this place a bit. There's no other dog and no one to talk to. I hate fences all round.

* * * *

I don't like him a bit. He's a feeble creature ; no character. I hate people who are always coaxing me to come to them. It's degrading.

* * * *

I shall concentrate on the cook.

* * * *

LATER.

The cook's a great disappointment. A vegetarian household, I'm afraid ; at any rate, no meat comes my way. Soaked biscuit and

Encounters and Diversions

cabbage—what's the use of that? Well, if I don't eat it they'll have to give me something better. Nothing like hunger-striking to make them nervous, and one must begin right. Poor mother always said that.

* * * *

Dear mother.

* * * *

I wish I'd been kinder to her.

* * * *

He. She's adamant. I can't get her to come within three yards, and then she's all suspicion. And the worst of it is she's so dainty. You can usually get at a dog through its greed; but not this one. I suppose if I tried raw beef it would be all right; but I don't care for such bribery as that, and the breeder's letter said on no account give meat.

* * * *

She. I was so hungry to-day I had to eat the biscuit. I'm furious about being so weak-minded, but one must live. The funny thing is it didn't taste so bad. Still, it was a mistake, and now perhaps I'll never persuade them and so never get any meat at all.

* * * *

He and She

He. I'm having rotten luck. To-day after lunch she let me approach my hand almost within an inch, and then a log fell and she rushed in alarm to the other end of the room. She thought I did it. Any unusual sudden frightening sound she blames me for.

* * * *

I've never been so disappointed.

* * * *

I always thought that spaniels were so affectionate.

* * * *

She. He still follows me about with his hand held out to me, making silly murmurs. It's sickening. How I dislike him !

* * * *

He. This morning a terrible thing happened. Tess ran into the field and caught a young chicken belonging to the farmer. If dogs pursue chickens it is, of course, fatal, so I had to be very severe. After ten minutes spent in pursuit I caught her and lashed her with a switch until she screamed.

* * * *

It was dreadful, but I had no option.

* * * *

Encounters and Diversions

Spare the rod and spoil the dog.

* * * *

But that, of course, settles it. She'll never come near me again. I may as well send her away and get another for all the comfort she'll ever be to me.

* * * *

She. I'm so sore. My sides are that tender I can hardly bear to lie down, and I'm too miserable to stand up. The fact is I worried a chicken. I was bored to death, and there the little idiot was—you know what fools chickens are—and so I grabbed it. It was only for fun ; but the way those people carried on ! And then HE came out with a lady's riding-whip and after no end of a chase caught me. I knew I was for it sooner or later, but I decided I'd lead him a dance.

* * * *

How he puffed and panted !

* * * *

And then he began to lay it on. My tail, but it hurt ! I yelled and yelled, but he went on and on until I really began to admire him in spite of myself. I didn't know he was so

He and She

masterful. I expected him to stop directly I screamed. But he went on and on until his arm must have ached.

* * * *

And then he flung me away.

* * * *

He. The most wonderful thing in the world has happened. She's sitting in my lap, licking my hand !

“ Norbury Jack ”



IT was shortly after “ Norbury Jack,” the Airedale, had received, on May 17th, 1923, the bronze medal of the National Canine Defence League for giving warning of fire, that a number of his fellow dogs met to decide upon what was the best form of honour that they too could offer him. Ordinarily, said the Chairman, a champion Mastiff, it was agreed by human beings that a dog’s virtue should be its own reward, but on this occasion a little imagination had entered into the case. The action of the National Canine Defence League did credit to their articulate two-legged friends. (Hear, hear.)

The chairman then reminded the meeting of “Norbury Jack’s” claim to distinction.

It seemed that on the night of April 18th attention was drawn to the blazing of the out-houses by the clamour which he raised. But

“ Norbury Jack ”

for that timely assistance the whole place would have been destroyed.

The Collie said that, though no doubt it was gratifying to see human beings alive to the intelligence of dogs, this seemed to him a rather trivial performance for so much attention. What dog was there in that room, who, in the presence of a rapidly encroaching fire, would not utter sounds of alarm ? To make a row under such conditions was practically automatic. (Oh, Oh !)

He was not trying to underrate “ Norbury Jack’s ” action ; he was merely suggesting that it was not a matter for any special excitement on their part. The medal was putting a premium on a purely instinctive action. Had “ Norbury Jack ” refrained from making a row, that would have been, if not precisely praiseworthy, at any rate remarkable. He personally was opposed to carrying the matter any further. (Groans.)

The Irish Setter here sprang to his feet to say that he totally disagreed with the last speaker, who, like most Scottish dogs, was cold and parochially and pedantically logical. (Hear, hear !) If merit were always measured in that frigid and mechanical way, the world would

Encounters and Diversions

not be worth living in. He moved that "Norbury Jack" be invited to as rich a banquet as could be arranged. (Loud cheers.)

The Greyhound said he should like to second that.

The Skye Terrier said that there was a great deal in what his friend and compatriot the Collie had put before them. Fire was such a terrifying element that few dogs could forbear from running screaming from it, and a sense of self-protection would probably cause them to run in the direction of their masters. None the less it was an admirable thing for the master to recognize the value of such a warning. A medal was all very well as a permanent token, but for real appreciation he, the speaker, was in favour of the banquet as well.

The Clumber Spaniel said that what they had to remember was that it was just as easy for a dog frightened by a fire to lose his head completely and run away from his owner, as towards him, and that in the present case "Norbury Jack" had run instantly towards his owner. That was the peculiar excellence of this case. Let there by all means be a banquet.

The Collie, asking leave to speak again,

“ Norbury Jack ”

repeated that he had no animus against “ Norbury Jack,” but he was against facile sentiment. He was, however, wholly in favour of the banquet.

The St. Bernard, who had come all the way from Switzerland to attend the meeting, said that he was delighted to hear of an Airedale winning a medal for assisting mankind. The circumstance that such altruism was a daily occurrence with himself did not detract from the merit of the deed. He hoped that the banquet would be arranged, and arranged quickly, as he should like to stay for it.

The Bedlington said that he should throw himself bodily into the banquet scheme.

The Newfoundland said that he agreed with the St. Bernard. He was glad to welcome the Airedale to the ranks of the life-savers.

The Aberdeen said that he had come to the meeting expressly to suggest a banquet.

The Yorkshire Terrier said that though his capacity was small he hoped to do justice to “ Norbury Jack’s ” heroism.

The Pomeranian said that he hoped there would be a banquet, but would take it kindly if there were no plum-pudding.

The Lurcher said that there were conceivable

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cases where a dog of spirit would be doing his only true duty if he allowed his master's house to burn down. He himself had a master so brutal and exacting that no calamity could be too severe for him.

The Chairman here interrupted to say that, interesting as was the last speaker's experience, it hardly bore upon the situation.

The Lurcher apologized for being so passionately personal and expressed his entire approval of the project of giving "Norbury Jack" a banquet.

The Sealyham, who claimed to be the most popular dog of the day, said that he would gladly extend his patronage to the banquet.

The Spaniel said that the notion of a banquet appealed to him.

The Pekinese (who was accompanied by a Chinese interpreter) said that in his country a dog's chief duty was to its parents and ancestors, but here, he had noticed, parents and children were quickly parted, usually for ever. An English dog normally never saw its father at all, and its mother only for a few weeks. If a dog had neither father nor mother to care for, it was right and proper to be solicitous about owners

“ Norbury Jack ”

and, if necessary, to give notice of fire. He was in favour of a banquet, and hoped there would be snipes' livers, as those were expressly mentioned by the best Chinese authority on the dietary of Pekinese spaniels. (Sensation.)

The French Poodle said that he had often done things quite as noteworthy and probably even more heroic than “ Norbury Jack,” but no one had recorded them. Heroism, he had observed, had got to happen at the right moment—that is to say when some one was looking—or it was in danger of being called duty. None the less he should register a vote for the banquet.

Other dogs having expressed their views in similar terms, the Chairman said that it seemed to be the wish of the majority that there should be a banquet and it was not necessary to take a show of tails. It only remained to appoint a small committee to carry out the arrangements. This the meeting was proceeding to do when I left.

Windfalls



RECESSIONAL

THE world now and then—praises be!—
goes backward.

Hugh, who is four years old, lately left his perfectly appointed London home for a few days at a seaside town where some of the most recent improvements are lacking.

His mother went down for the week-end, to see how the place was suiting him, and Hugh and his nurse were at the station.

“We’ve got the most exciting thing in our house you ever saw,” he said.

“What is it?” his mother asked.

“No,” he said, “it’s a secret. You’ll see it this afternoon, just before tea.” He jumped for joy.

Just before tea the great moment came and with it the triumph, the novelty.

The gas was lighted!

Windfalls

A PHILOSOPHER

“And where do you go for your holidays?”
I asked him.

“We don’t go anywhere,” he said. “I can’t afford it. And I don’t care about it very much either. Lodgings are not comfortable.”

He resumed his attack on my thinning locks.

“Every one should have some kind of change,”
I said.

“That’s right,” he replied. “And we do. We’ve got a little plan of our own that’s like a holiday and isn’t one; it gives us a change and doesn’t cost anything.”

I asked for the solution.

“It’s very simple,” he said. “You’ll laugh at it. But it’s this: we just exchange bedrooms. There’s my wife and myself and my son and my daughter. Three rooms. Well, we exchange. We move the furniture and the pictures, and there you are. You wake up in the morning and look out of a different window. The door’s in a new place. It’s a change.”

“And are your family satisfied too?” I asked.
“Your son and daughter? Don’t they want the seaside or the country?”

“No,” he said; “they’re quite happy. But

Encounters and Diversions

sometimes they ask if they may re-paper their walls, and I let them. That makes a change too."

LIFE

Once upon a time, on a gusty day, a man was counting his money in his car, and one of the notes blew away all unknown to its owner.

It lodged unseen in the wet grass at the side of the road, until by and by two wayfarers came along. One of them was a millionaire returning from the neighbouring golf links ; the other was a wretched old woman faint from hunger. It was the millionaire who, preceding her by a few yards, found the note.

BREAD ON THE WATERS

Uncle Roland, home from the East, was on his first visit to his married sister since the boys were mere mites, and he made himself very popular. When it was discovered that his birthday was on November 2 the boys clubbed their pocket-money to give him a present worth having, as a mark of their very great esteem. They gave him five shillings'-worth of fireworks.

Windfalls

THE BAD INFLUENCE

I was calling, the other day, on a friend—one of the gentlest of men, gracious, considerate, unselfish—and suddenly his telephone bell rang. I asked, as I always do, if I should leave him alone while he answered it, but he said No, and I remained.

I wish I hadn't, for I received the shock of my life when he suddenly exploded into a fury and attacked some other unfortunate telephoner who was talking across him.

"Get off the line!" he screamed, his face purpling with rage.

When he had put back the receiver he apologized.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "It's a most distressing thing, but the telephone has that effect on me. I can't restrain myself. I am normally placid and easy-going, tolerant of other people's irritating ways. But on the telephone I can't keep my temper. I chafe at delay, I fume at wrong numbers, I lose all my courtesy to women, and you heard me just now abusing that quite innocent offender. It's very serious; it's shortening my life, souring my

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nature. I am perfectly convinced that the telephone is a mischievous institution, and in the interest of sweetness and light it ought to be abolished. How does it affect a courteous even-tempered man like you ? ”

“ Just the same,” I said.

THE PHYSIOGNOMIST

London, when she lost the hansom and the four-wheeler, lost also the waterman ; for such was the odd name by which the cab-rank attendant used to be known. His official position was that of refresher of horses, but he gave more attention to the duty of looking out for fares, catching their eyes, holding the door open for them with one hand and extending the other for twopence.

We could do with the waterman now, for taxi-drivers have a way of sinking either into newspapers or slumber, and disregarding signals of distress. But except here and there he has gone. One, however, was on duty the other day in Piccadilly, when a friend of mine—a man of distinguished appearance and of some personal pride—was passing along the Green Park side, bent upon the economy of a bus to Kensington.

Windfalls

As he proceeded he was aware, not far ahead of him, of a smiling roguish fellow holding open a taxi-door, with every indication that it was for him that the civility was intended.

“Here you are, Sir,” said the waterman.

“But I didn’t hail you,” said my friend.

“No,” said the waterman, “but you’ve got a taxi-face.”

And my friend stepped in.

THE REASON

I was asking my attendant, the Italian, if he intended to go to his home city, Milan, for his holidays.

“No,” he said ; “when my father and mother were alive I liked to go home. Now only brothers and sisters, and I don’t. They think that every one in England is rich ; that you have only to stoop down to pick up gold. If I give them only a little money, they treat me as though I was a criminal. If I give them much, they expect more.”

THE MIND-CHANGER

My friend the lift-man wore a look of gloom. Usually so bright and talkative, he was now silent and depressed.

Encounters and Diversions

“Anything wrong?” I asked.

“Everything,” he said. “I daren’t go home.”

“Oh, rubbish!” I replied. “Of course you can. Why not?”

“The missis,” he said.

I admit that the reason might be a formidable one, but not in his case. From all that he had led me to imagine, his home life was serene; and I had seen the lunches she prepared for him. Thoughtful lunches.

“Tell me,” I said.

He opened an evening paper and pointed to the four o’clock. “Do you see what price the winner was?” he asked.

I saw: 33 to 1. “Great odds,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied. “And the missis gave me half-a-crown to back it with.”

“And you forgot?” I suggested.

“No, I didn’t,” he said. “I wish I had. It was worse than that. I changed her mind for her, and put it on something else—an also-ran. And there she is, waiting, so excited, with over four quid to come—and I changed her mind for her. Blimey, I’m not half for it!”

Windfalls

BLOWN TO AN AGUE

A West African letter, the writer of which was smarting under an affront, real or imaginary, suffered in a Lagos bank :—

DEAR SIR,—Of necessity, I am compelled to complain to you Sir, the hautiness embossed on me some hours ago.

It came to pass that I appeared before the Cashier on the Counter this morning purposely to draw some amount and I, being hasty, invoked his attention which resulted in an insult from him with the most abusive word “ silly ” repeatedly ; which struck me to the utmost and blew me to an ague. And this insulter at once reported to the accountant, asked him to close my account simply to punish me prejudicially after having stained me respectability with unfair words.

I cannot pose as one possessing the authority to speak the faults of the staff but as a regular customer enjoying mutuality, and I believe if such a process does not receive a full stop which it deserves, it will be a means to suffocation to the progressive regularity of the customers and the advancement of the company.

The English language is far too limited to

Encounters and Diversions

adequately express how achy I feel when such an abuse was focussed on me.

I do not write to teach your worthiness what to do, but respectfully conjure a precaution to suppress such a practice.

Awaiting your justifiably reply,

I remain,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant.

I see no reason why the writer of that letter should abuse the English language for its inadequacy.

THE TWO WIVES

Once upon a time there were two girls who married on the same day, and several years afterwards they met again.

“Is your husband kind?” asked one.

“He’s the kindest thing you ever heard of,” said the other. “There’s nothing he won’t do for me. He is always buying me presents; he thinks of my comfort continually; he is unfailingly fond.”

“Then you are happy?” asked the other.

Windfalls

“Tell me about yours,” she said.

“My husband isn’t like that,” said the other ;
“he is all extremes. He lost his money, and we are not rich, like you, but very poor. And he can be so violent. Sometimes he treats me cruelly ; sometimes he doesn’t speak for days ; often he is drunk. I never know what to expect. But then, when he is not beside himself, no one can be so loving. His love is wonderful.”

“I envy you,” said the rich woman.

THE SECRETS

I was sitting at the bedside of a philosopher aged and fragile.

“The secret of dying,” he said, “is to grow fonder and fonder of sleep.”

“And of living ? ” I asked.

“The secret of living,” he said, “is to be always ready for death, but far from eager for it.”

NOTE

THE foregoing fugitive essays and sketches have been collected from *Punch*, the *Home Magazine*, the *Quiver*, and *Good Housekeeping*. I offer my thanks to those in authority for permission to reprint. Everything has been revised.

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with its trail of half-fed children and men 'economised' into misery. In a society in which many millions of men are perpetually starved of the colour and rich variety of life, their energies cheated, war is an outlet for other energies than the energy of hate.

We have two socially irresponsible classes—an upper and a lower, a rich, spending class and a poor, machine-serving class, both relieved from the *necessity* of taking any interest in the direction of society. Either may choose to play a part, or to try to play a part. Their mere existence side by side is a source of bad taste and bad blood. The excremental houses, furniture, books, films, deposited in such vast quantities in every country, should warn us that we are being poisoned—neither our minds nor our senses are trained to reject this machine-made ugliness. Our rulers have no time and no will to train us, just as and for the same reasons that they have neither time nor will to rid us of poverty and war. The Acquisitive Society perpetuates the existence of irresponsible classes. War is the final solution of their mindless and irresponsible activities, and their wasted or unsatisfied passions.

Any change in society, *for the better*, must be towards creating fewer irresponsible and insensitive men and women, able to endure ugliness because their senses do not reject it. But this involves us

in the necessity of dissociating the right to be well-educated from purely irrelevant circumstances. We should have to educate each child according to its real abilities, and in deciding whether it should be trained with a view to manual or intellectual labours we could not take into account the accident of its father being a company director or a coal-heaver. We waste a great deal of good human material by confusing real biological inequalities with artificially-created ones. To make certain that no real ability was being wasted or deformed we should have to bring up every child in the same natural environment—that is, in respect of their food, clothing, fine airy rooms, exercise and the rest. But this is to make such reckless use of our acquired knowledge and skill that the coal-heaver's child, only by being born, falls heir to the sum of civilisation. There is no natural reason why it should not, since it has not yet had time to prove that it is too lazy, or too stupid, or too ill-natured, to be turned into a valuable citizen. Our present reasons for behaving towards it, at sight, as if it deserved no better than a poor and scanty nurture, are all forced on us by the simple fact (which has a complex cause) that our system of production has out-run its capacity for distribution. It would seem that if, with wise husbandry of our human resources, we wish to breed fully-responsible citizens, we shall be forced to cut our stick for a

fully-educated and classless society—despite the losses it would inflict on the makers of cheap nasty furniture, films, books, houses.

There is a vital relationship of war, poverty, and Fascism. If we will war, we will poverty with the same impulse. If we cannot get rid of poverty, with its dead weight of the irresponsible and the repressed, we cannot eliminate war. Fascism exploits and perpetuates both. Poverty, and the fear of poverty, so deform men that an ambitious and unscrupulous man, a dictator, can do as he pleases with them. And war, the threat of war, and preparations for it, are as excellent a rod as he needs to keep order in the ranks of a regimented nation.

Moreover, what does a man change who exchanges the life of a machine-serf for that of a soldier? One offers a quick death; the other squeezes the life out of him slowly over years. To our present condition, the machine has a higher value than that of the man who serves it. If it were not so, should we leave young men to rot in body and mind because no machines need their attention? We deny to these many men and women the human right to enjoy their minds and bodies in a proper rhythm of work and play. Good food, wine, music, books, leisure, are not for them. In short, we behave to them in times of peace as if they were only fit to mind a machine (or to be kept half-alive in case they should be needed to mind one). We

prepare them for Fascism—what freedom have they to lose?—and to shout for war at the bidding of any of their rulers, who have never taught them to use their minds or given them anything to lose except their rags.

More than half a million English died in the last war. Not all of these were without a vision of their country—for which and not for some abstract notion of duty they died. If you could ask one of them why he fought, he would perhaps answer, 'Because I was conscripted'; but another, turning, would say, 'I fought for a field and the corner of a lane'; and another, 'It was for a house like, but not exactly like, a million others.' The England of their vision was a kindly country. It did not appear to them in the form of a derelict shipbuilding town where iron and men rust together. 'They died for England'—but it was for an England which, stubborn in faith, they believed would come from their efforts. Under the soil of those other countries, their mouths gape open on a question, one only, the same day after day, from that moment when they were still part of our lives to this, 'For what did we die?'

There is no answer. Is it an answer to say, 'We have done something for our unemployed and their children, doling out life with a close hand'? Is it an answer if we talk of keeping order by taking away men's liberty? The refusal to disarm, the

new preparations to re-arm, answer them with a hideous mockery. 'Yes, yes, you died for a new and more deadly gun, a new gas.' If there should be another war, and any who are reading this survive, they will at least know the answer to that persistent question, 'For what did we die here?' For nothing.

You cannot prevent war by appealing to men's interests. At some moment their aimless passions will defeat you. You must set other work for their passions, before it is too late. To call them up for peace needs only the liberating force of an ideal, breaking into their minds. The avoidance of war is not an end in itself. It is a means, a condition without which we cannot find any answer fit to make to our half-million of dead.

For our virtues, we still have time given us to choose between plain issues. Do we choose to be governed despotically, or to govern ourselves in a condition of greater freedom and greater individual responsibility—dictatorship, or a society of self-respecting (because respected) men and women? to prize, as now, machines above men, or men more than machines? to lapse into war and anarchy, or knowingly to accept the necessity of taking the first steps towards a European union? There is no way in which we can maintain ourselves where we are, in an irresponsible and half-educated democracy; at peace and not at peace. Either

people must be educated to stand the rigours of freedom, or they should not be teased with glimpses of it. Either this country must be willing to plan boldly for peace, or we shall find ourselves planning, with our usual mingling of niceness and prudence, for another war. We have a tradition of freedom. We can lose it by resigning it in a moment of panic to a leader who promises to save us from our own weakness. Equally we can lose it by too narrow an interpretation—as if nothing had happened in the last quarter-century that should alter our conception of free national States.

Where the *rulers* have no vision, the people perish. For a nation of shopkeepers we are singularly less anxious to make a profit than to tell or to hear some new thing. The Puritan delight in success for its own sake is not truly at home with us. Anyone who lives in a small town, small enough to be itself and not the copy of a city, knows the alacrity with which the shutters are put up for a day off—on any excuse or none. So now if we are out of heart it is because we have neither bread nor dreams. This is a people which rouses itself only when it is asked to do something too hard for it. Our leaders—politicians, newspaper peers and the like—serve even their own interests badly by advocating all the time measures of self-interest and safety. They could have the people awake and eager, roused from apathy, by a policy of bold adventure.

In the past there have been little Englanders (one has a pen in her fingers writing the words), in love with an England which never was but could be, and, as if opposing them, internationalists of a country no smaller than Europe. It is time for the two dreams to grow together. The jealous lover of England can no longer separate her in his dreams from the other countries of Europe. Only to live, and to grow to her full strength, she must make advances to become one of a larger family. It is true the other members of this family—or their heads, since the common people are everywhere for peace—are as suspicious of each other, ready to take offence and to accuse each other of bad faith, as if they lived on separate planets. But sanity has not yet left them. There is still time to be adventurers for an idea. Do not our rulers know that we are hungrier for a faith than for bread? The dry husks of their policies do not feed us. We know, without their mumbling it over and over, that the situation abroad is menacing and uncertain, and know, too, where to lay part of the blame. We have waited, and are still waiting, for a sign that they have as much passion for peace as we common men have, and as much faith as would move them towards deserving it. If there was one English statesman could see farther than his nose (and his place) to draw us the design of a settled Europe, with England its heart, we should believe and live.

Ours is the largest and most important political unit in the world. Our people occupy territory in every continent; our interests—more penetrating—cross the frontiers of every foreign State. More than any other State, more even than those which exceed us in actual or potential wealth, we can influence world thought. This power we have is recognised by other countries. The gestures we make, they will copy. The course we take, they will follow; the policy we commend, if we ensue it, they will prefer. Of the politicians who throng that Hall of Hopes, the Assembly at Geneva, it is the British on whom all wait. It is therefore our duty, and it should be our pleasure, to assume the responsibility, and show the bogged and strayed nations of Europe a road to follow. In the past our political servants (our elected representatives are our servants: we have not yet made the *arriviste* our master) have dodged, shied, put down their heads, stuck in their feet, rolled over, rather than commit the country to a positive policy. In defence of their negation, they have tried to shift the burden of their servile reluctance to act on to the unwillingness of the politicians of other countries—‘Poor-spirited men use arts of protraction, and make their position contemptible.’

It is the privilege, the right and the duty of great Britain and the Dominions, the most powerful, as it is the most democratic, group of great Powers

within the League, to ensure the peace of the world. We have held back from our responsibility too long.

‘Now the great curse of European politics at the present day was that though the peace *lovers* were in a large majority, the peace *makers* were in a minority. England was the chief offender. What was the use of her platonic efforts for peace if she could never summon up courage to give some solid proof of her love? By her voluntary withdrawal from the chessboard, she had deprived the party of international order of its best piece.’ These words were written by one of the acutest of English diplomatists, Sir Robert Morier, sixty years ago. If, as Mr. Baldwin suggests, our frontier is now the Rhine, Morier’s words are to-day doubly true. Our duty is to lead, not to withdraw.

Indeed we cannot withdraw. Our frontier is not the Rhine. In actual fact, we have no frontier, or our frontiers are the edges of the world.

On November 10th, 1932, Mr. Baldwin appealed to the conscience of the young men, in whose hands, he said, it lay to decide ‘this bloody issue of war. . . . If,’ said he, ‘the conscience of the young men should ever come to feel with regard to this one instrument [the air arm] that it is evil and should go, the thing will be done; but if they do not feel like that—well, as I say, the future is in their hands. But when the next war comes, and European civilisation is wiped out, as it will be and by no

force more than by that force, then do not let them lay the blame upon the old men. Let them remember that they, they principally, or they alone, are responsible for the terrors that have fallen upon the earth.'

So Pilate '*took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood. . . .*'

We who write here think it more pertinent to appeal to the conscience of the older men—whose hands are still clutching as firmly as ever the power to order the lives of these same young men. It is in their hands, and not in any younger hands, to take the decisions that will bring to us war or peace. They will not be innocent of the blood if our sons are enlisted, not to defend but to destroy civilisation, in another and more hideous war.

For belief, and for the courage which having a belief gives, there needs no certainty of a victory. It *may* be too late. Unreason and violence may triumph. To a politician, whose notions of victory rarely go beyond securing his place, that may seem of great importance. To most of us, and especially to young men and women, it is of none. In my part of England, when anyone says, 'You mustn't do it, it's impossible,' we have a way of answering with a kind of shrewd bold conceit, 'Why, it can be *tried!*'

'You mustn't dream of it, a united Europe is impossible.'

‘Why, it can be tried!’

In Germany, the supporters of a Liberal democracy were defeated and punished because they had no passion. Many men have died for an idea, but they drew it again for themselves in working dress—as no soldier ever died for ‘England’ or for ‘France,’ but for something much simpler and lighter to carry. To rouse us from our sleep-walking state, with all its dangers, wants some reality at hand. We who are only ‘clerks’ and ordinary men have less authority than others, than the men who misrepresent us at conferences and the like. But it seems we have the better heads. To us at least it has become clear that there is no safety in sitting close at home, not even if we should have as many aeroplanes as there are gulls about our shores.

Many voices must drown ours before the strife is ended between those who would be willing to pay for lasting peace and those who are preparing a war which, it is likely, they will not have to fight. It is something that we have on our side half a million whose names can be read on memorials in the cities, towns, and small villages of our country.

1934.

Some rash editor must have allowed me to write this marginal note, but alas I cannot remember who did.

Genius

WE have become so ashamed of uttering the word 'genius' that well-known reviewers are constrained to apologise for bestowing it on no more than two new writers a month. Their nervousness is a just punishment on them for reading so much fiction, a habit which would weaken the moral fibre of a saint, and there is no need to suppose that our critics are all Saint Sebastians. Neither need we fly to the other verge and conclude that ours is an age without a recognisable literary genius. I shall give myself the pleasure of commenting on two—it is true they are dead—in the belief that it is only in the living example that we can understand the nature of the mortal illness to which we have given the name 'genius'. It is a sickness because it behaves much as do those invading physical cells which disturb the balance of a man's body and kill him in the end unless they are arrested or cut clean out. The writer, painter, composer, of genius feeds either on others or on himself; if the latter he is singularly apt to die young.

It is the nature of genius to see and to know more both of the present and the future than we

others see. In this way it becomes the interpreter, the ambassador, of the future to the present. Talented persons can discover the seeds of tomorrow living in the earth, but for none of these is the future a living reality, as it is in the consciousness of genius. In the novels of D. H. Lawrence the present is a mirror which has the power to reflect the future. No more vivid accounts of the present day exist than those in which he describes the lives of miners, unconscious creators of our world; a so-called 'advanced' society; a war-time music hall; a bull fight; the look of our industrial civilisation seen from below. His books are alive with jostling shapes—trees, mountains, animals, fields, foreign cities, continents. Under the seeming solidity of this creation we become aware of tremendous cracks, fissures into which it may disappear. This miner's son was born at the moment when we have to choose between mastering or being enslaved by the energies released when the first miner drove his spade into the ground. He knew that we in England have broken nakedly with a past of secure narrow communities and he feared what may become of us, rootless, in a world without any values but those of the money-lender. His knowledge of the future was entirely instinctive. He did not know, when he exalted the 'warm living blood' above the intellect and threw up his cap for the 'dark gods' who are waiting to take

possession, that a faith will arise which orders men to 'think with their blood' and kill their intellectual enemies. His instinct warned him only of the nearness of this return to barbarism, and because he believed that it was better than sterility and dryness he welcomed it.

Compare him with a writer of far greater intellect, the German novelist, Broch, author of *The Sleepwalkers*. This long work displays qualities lacking in D. H. Lawrence's novels, scholarship, balance, a vast social knowledge. With infinite patience and courage the German writer shows off the contemporary scene against a background of the long travail of civilisation until this moment of awful uncertainty and awful loneliness. It is the loneliness and the uncertainty through which a woman passes to give birth, and Broch has faith that the new birth is the brotherhood of man.

It is possible.

Certainly, no one can read this book without being altered by the experience. And yet in the end one hesitates to use the word 'genius' of him, because the sap of the future does not rise in his work, as it rises in Lawrence's. We receive him only in our minds, but our senses do not think with him; we reason with him about the future, but it neither freezes nor warms us as it does when Lawrence shows us the smoke rising from the ground.

Here is another English writer—the evidence in her case is briefer, but conclusive. Romer Wilson died a few years ago; her death was little noticed and the Book Society did not go into mourning. Perhaps it was not then in being. Never mind—it is scarcely likely that it would have troubled. Romer Wilson had not a great many readers, although for one novel, *The Death of Society*, she was given the Hawthornden Prize. This was in the Silver Age of the Hawthornden Prize. In her, genius was a short cut between the senses and the unconscious mind. She had as sharp an ear for the future as Lawrence and she, too, heard little that was comfortable. (Read *Dragon's Blood* for a premonition of the madness and bitterness that served Hitler's turn.) But her original virtue was the sensuous quickness with which she leapt at what is living and essential in any man or woman. What we touch in the men and women in her books is the naked rage of their life, articulate in their words and deeds. She is not interested in the inessential clothing of speech and deed in which we embed our few real feelings, those rare experiences in which we are wholly—with every sense and nerve—involved. She told me once that she wrote without any deliberate or conscious intention. For long periods she felt no impulse to write; then the imperative need seized her and, shutting herself away, she wrote what it told her

to write, until she was exhausted. If Mr. or Miss So-and-so had told me that their endless mechanically functioning novels were inspired, I should not believe a word of it. I believed Romer Wilson because no fragment she left, however trivial, is less than alive.

The nature of genius, then, seems to involve an extreme sensitivity to the sounds, sights, and hidden essential forms of all life. The response which the sensitised nerves of the artist makes to his world varies according to an infinite number of accidents—as a love of going much into company or distaste for it, having a robust sensual body or one crippled or sickly, having a Catholic or a Calvinist as nurse. Time runs through these differences. There are epochs when the artist has enough to do copying out the actual forms of his world. The sharpened senses of the artist of 1935 seem to feel the pressure of forces which are still below the surface of our world, working in it to change, perhaps to destroy it. The note of warning, of uneasy fear, is persistent in all the older serious writers—that is, worth serious attention—Lawrence and T. S. Eliot among them. A writer so essentially liberal as E. M. Forster, the most exquisitely balanced mind among living writers, has practically ceased to write. One could think that his apprehensions of what is happening in the world are too much for him. The significant work of sculptors—

Henry Moore, John Skeaping—is profoundly disturbing. There is a Skeaping, the figure of a naked young woman, in which the uneasy intellect in the face is contradicted by the exaggerated peasant heaviness of the body—a lapse into barbarism (perhaps after another war?) could breed just such a type from the cultured and mentally alert woman of 1935.

It is easier to describe water than to give an account of genius. To say—it is perhaps true—that it is born in a peculiar instability or tension or susceptibility of the nerves, as if the nervous system were less or more highly charged with the electric fluid, is to say as much as we say of running water when we announce its rate of flow. But there is perhaps here a germ of the cause why there are so few women of genius. Tension and instability of the nervous system do not fit well with childbearing, and perhaps only after innumerable generations in which part of the women deny their biological function will the nervous condition of genius begin to be as common in women as men. It is an interesting speculation—and not less so because of what it implies. What happens meanwhile in a world in which the white peoples are always growing fewer? It may be noted in passing that one half of the affair is beginning to move. But do not let us look for a crop of female geniuses in this decade or the next but ten.

The sensitive instability explains perhaps, a little, why a writer of genius can give as good an account of women as of men. Any talented writer with acute observation and a mastery of colloquial speech can produce semblances of men and women to fill his pages and pockets. The impulses which actually move men and women—to acts of devotion, meanness, heroism—are only guessed at by him, if so much. And he, or she, will naturally make the more accurate guesses in what we may call the native sex of either. But these profound impulses are human—‘common are to either sex,’ as the most useful of poets has said—and the pain of genius is to feel them at their most intense and expose them with the most unflinching truth. Compare the male characters invented by that highly talented writer Charlotte Brontë with the male presences in *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë may never have noticed that men’s clothes differed from women’s, but she knew by experiencing it the rage of male jealousy, anger, and tenderness, and it is there pressed out living. Compare Arnold Bennett’s shrewd gossipy chatter about the little tricks of domesticated women with the exposure of the physical woman in Joyce’s Marion Bloom.

Both instances suggest another characteristic of genius—exuberant nervous vitality, which may last through a more than normal lifetime, as in William Blake, or may burn out its possessor in a few years.

Vitality from this source can take the place of bodily robustness: perhaps it always happens that nervous vitality is fed by the other, and that we only do not notice it when a man as strong as a giant is in question. It is, one hopes, needless to add that the nervous vitality of genius has no other relation with the gross physical vitality which encourages Mr. and Miss So-and-so to continue writing the same book or painting the same picture year in and year out to vomiting.

Have we the right to speak of 'a genius for friendship'? That goes, I think, too far. A talent for friendship—yes, it is only a talent, a fine one, but that could as easily be debased to acting or diplomacy, which makes its owner a glove to fit any hand. But here I recall James Boswell. If it had not been for his determination to be a friend we should never have known that he was a genius.

1935.

Another of those trivial pieces in which my obsessions appear so plainly that I am startled. It is as though one threw a few shells into a box and found a year or two later that they had arranged themselves in the form of a skeleton.

Technique for Living

It seems that I am one of those who spend their lives practising how to live. There must be a great many of us, and it is on their behalf, on behalf of the others, that I am willing to take up some account. What is happiness? what is a good life? I know one answer, but it is not complete. The good way of life is that one which leads us to live in our world (which perhaps we did not choose and can by no means alter) with the least possible unpleasantness between it and us, and the finest use for our energies. An excellent answer. The more I look at it the better I like it, and the drier it appears. My quarrel with my world goes on, and, tired of it, I see that any tree has a better discipline of life, knows what it wants—that is, to grow—and finds means to do that without any noise.

What I desire and what my world offers me have not fitted. If this conflict should not be settled before I am, I mean before my death—I can think of more than one way of ending this sentence but none of them is worth writing at my age. In the eleventh century a man might choose

to resign a life of action and turn monk because his desire for learning drew him that way. He chose the half of life he most needed, letting the other wither in him. A short breathing-space came in England just before the industrial revolution—men could live in the world and have freedom to think—the world seemed to move at about the pace of a man's thoughts. To-day, the two have drawn apart so far that not one man in a million lives as he thinks. The world is moving at terrific speed on a course for which no charts have been drawn, and as if it were not anxiety enough not to know where we are rushing we must always fear being left behind, as too old or too slow. Anxiety kills more people than war. The race of men has grown vastly rich and powerful—the feeblest of us with his fingers on a switch commands hellish powers—and vastly, fearfully insecure. Where can we find leisure? what shall we hope? what do we believe?

What, if you were a writer, would you name success? To be read by a great many persons? Then you must write only what a great many persons wish to hear—you must persuade them that their lives, lived between two walls, have a meaning, a splendour. If they are afraid—and who is not?—you must soothe their doubts; ignorant, you may lead them into the world; and you may make them laugh or cry if you know

the motions. Confide in them, be very friendly and open. Above all, do not think what few wish to hear, or feel what most miss.

The devil of it is that not one of us, not the stupidest and the least sensitive, but thinks at his most secret of what he would much rather forget, and feels, when he is feeling freely and not as he has been told to, an agony or an ecstasy he cannot use. A writer who wishes to be honest—to be himself, as we say, and not a rag-bag—must write of these things, must throw away what he comes first to, and bring out his essence. Only to find that no one will buy from him this honesty, which disturbs, perhaps is scarcely decent, or kind. Then what? To withdraw? to find a room in a tower, furnish it, live retired and as sparsely as possible? But this mutilates the self as grossly as a dishonest success. X——, who writes (as I think) dishonest easy books, pleases everyone with them and can see Vienna when he likes. What shall it profit a man if he gains his soul and loses the whole world?

Before I understood the problem I lived it. When I was a child I had already looked round me to be famous, to see the world, in a word, to be free. I was born stubborn, unwilling to learn what I did not like. I read for pleasure and to astonish my teachers. As I look over my shoulder at those years they divide: beginning in eternity I came early into the way of time. From thirteen,

the years are marked off by the examinations that fell in December or June. I went at these like a man cutting steps in a rock. They were my road to the world. I had no guide, other than my devouring ambition—it was not guide, but goad. I was hungry for knowledge, all knowledge. The other day, turning the pages of an old encyclopædia, I found words pencilled in a round hand beside the articles on Hegel, Kant, Leibnitz, and some others, and I remembered what I had long forgotten, a resolve I had when I was fifteen to read all the philosophers: it seemed proper to begin by reading about them and so I pursued them through the eleven heavy volumes with (you can be sure) as little pleasure as understanding.

We have a cruel saying in my part of the world—‘Let want be your master.’ For years I striving with my savage company of wants made a battle-field of my life. I wanted learning with fame, and great possessions with peace. After the War, when I came to try my fortune in London, I ran to picture galleries and coveted the paintings for my own: an apt pupil, I learned anything I could about a way of life, of living, traditions, which are supported by money and cannot exist without it, and there were times when I was determined at any cost to have money.

For a poor man to become rich needs more than energy, greed, discontent. It needs a single mind,

and that I had not. There are values in living which are strictly incompatible with success. These I knew by sight. They came between me and my ambition, yet ambition would not stand aside for them, and I wore myself out serving as many masters as I had at that time minds.

This grew impossible—not only for me. In the world during these years something is abroad which can be called ‘the sense of the abyss’. All men feel unsafe. At an earlier moment in history men, threatened with disaster they did not know how to fight, might resign themselves and their will and spirits into the hands of God. But God has withdrawn out of mind. The only hands held out are those of a Leader.

For me, and for all who are of my mind, a Leader is nothing, useless, an impertinence. We cannot live in the life of another man, or of a State, or any other inhuman and bloody abstraction. Yet we don’t like being lonely. We should like company, to be one of many, if we could have it, with freedom. We cannot engage ourselves to march blind. We must know what threatens, or saves, enquire freely the order of the day.

Now here is one thing I am certain of, among much that is uncertain. This is a time not to gather possessions but to discard what can be discarded. If we are to have change, a new journey, let us travel light. Stripped of unnecessary, now

unwanted, possessions what shall I have gained? At once—freedom from one anxiety. Ease—‘Leave comfort root-room.’ But I have not a great deal to discard, or might I not find it more difficult? Nor is simplicity everything—peace is most what I need, a mind that wastes none of its energies in useless anger or despair. I know that peace is not rest from living—death is what we call that. It is active, a hard doing; it is to try the actions that satisfy us. So if I am to be free and to act freely—not always thinking, Can I say this, dare that?—I must throw down what burdens heart and mind, as did Christian: but I miss Christian’s way, and so do most of us now.

A man or woman with a burden is a nuisance to everyone. Mine is the feeling of being responsible for some people—which is not kindness—it is only the other side of my bitter sense of possession. I have never wanted anything in my life unless I wanted it with my whole self, and what I have had once is the harder for me to let go.

This is excusable in first youth, but after that it is hideous—learning to live becomes learning to give up. A young woman feels intensely responsible for her son. The idea that an accident or another war may destroy him is never out of her mind though she may not be thinking of it. This is all very well, and it is right she should loathe war, which kills to no purpose. But the

time comes when she is *not* responsible for him, or responsible only as much as she is for every other human being—to do as she would be done by.

Then, one must learn, and the sooner after leaving childhood the better, not to rely completely on any other human being. The longer this lesson takes to learn the harder, not the easier, it is. Once learned it becomes lighter. We learn our deepest emotions young, at the beginning of our lives, even if at first we are not very adroit. I can change at any age my taste in books, but not my way of falling in love or of being deceived—the ‘figure in the carpet’. My friend, N——, who married at eighteen, a few years later heard of her husband’s mistress: she went to great trouble to visit her, and tortured herself and her husband with questions and conjectures. She was irreconcilable. Their marriage really came to an end then: it lasted for two more years; by this time she was ill with jealousy and disappointment. She married a second time when she was thirty-one. I did not see her for eight years: she told me then that she had had much the same bitter experience, but on the second occasion, although she found herself behaving, *as if forced to do so*, almost exactly in the same ways, she had recovered quickly, before her marriage was injured. ‘You see, I had learned,’ she said smiling, ‘that one has no natural right to kindness. It is nothing unless freely given.’ Life

has one weapon the less against us when we can practise this feint.

At the end of this road—not everyone need go so far as the end to have it—is an extraordinary experience, one of the oddest in life. The exhilaration which springs from the sense of having lost everything. It is a feeling like no other, a curious form of spiritual intoxication, perhaps not repeatable.

I am very slow, but do not think that I have learned nothing about living. I now realise that life must be lived in its present moments—I have wasted half a lifetime living in the future. I wanted to live more than people ordinarily do. I can scarcely remember or believe how violent my hunger was. Its violence defeated it. Life is only intense when we allow it to live through us, in its own time—just as the moments of ecstasy always come uninvited and from the simplest things.

A few people are born who know at once how to live. D. H. Lawrence had a genius for living—he went at it naturally, as he wrote, in complete unselfconscious energy. I could address to him from myself the letter an Earl of Salisbury wrote in 1608 to the King's son. 'Such is the disproportion between your Highness and me (you the son of Jupiter and I his poor beagle). . . .' My distrustful awkward nature, as ashamed of its hopes as of its passions, is the very opposite of his. Yet even to me some aptness has been given with

time, in time. I learn, though slowly, not to leave myself naked to the weather moods of those I live with. My weak need to be approved—a child afraid of the incomprehensible anger of others—grows less with each time I ignore it. I learn patience, too—‘Patience exquisite, That plumes to Peace thereafter.’ I don’t know whether one should learn not to hate. Hate may be a bitter but a necessary astringent, to use sometimes if we are not to lose courage to enjoy a world which is destroying itself.

1935.

More obsessions. If after I am dead some friendly and inquisitive fellow-shade asks me: 'What surprised you most when you were alive?' I shall have to answer: 'The lies which otherwise honest men told about war. And that so many people tolerated the existence of poverty.' I have never been able to understand how we excuse the one simple fact that some children have much and others little. It is to me inexcusable. Biological inequalities are one thing, and unnatural (that is, non-biological) inequality another. Every now and then I am forced to realise freshly that there actually are people who believe that children are born divided into those who must have everything they need and the others who must put up with the leavings. It is always a shock.

On Patriotism

IF preferring England over other countries as a place to live in, and if an irrational pride in my English nurture, mark the patriot, then I am one. But I find myself unwelcome in a company which includes a number of persons of whom I disapprove as thoroughly as they of me. I am an unashamed Little Englander. I wish our Empire were no larger than Norway's, and our population of the same proportion. Then London would still be a habitable city, and the loveliest country in the world would not have been fouled with slums.

I was born fortunate—that is, in Whitby; and intolerant, that is, a Yorkshireman. The education I got settled me in my belief that to have character and to be English mean the same—which is precisely what Fichte had thought some years earlier about the Germans. I do not expect to die less convinced than I was then that the world would go on very badly without its English. My feeling for England is coloured by my fortunate birth. Had I been born, say, in a colliery town, in one of those streets of small featureless houses, divided from the neighbouring street by a row of closets, I should-

have felt less respect for my country. It is perhaps because I know what England can mean to a child that I find completely intolerable the thought of what it means to too many children, whose later memories, unlike mine, cannot rest secure between sea and meadow, the blue and the green. Whatever happens, I have known the very best England can give a thankful child.

A convention is growing up to pretend that the War did not affect one generation more than others. It is one of the ways, familiar and not unforgivable, in which we try to evade an unpleasant thought. Perhaps it is not of any moment that my generation was buried before it had time to speak, but why pretend that the survivors are not affected by their isolation and (more) by their learning at a green age what certain phrases—such phrases, let us say, as ‘national honour,’ ‘sacrifice,’ and the like—are worth in common reality. It was perhaps necessary for one of my nature and bringing-up to live through a Great War to learn that no country, not even England, can conduct a modern war without dishonouring herself. It is not merely that such a war, with its unparalleled opportunities for making a money profit, brings out all the lice, small and large. And not the repulsive anatomy of fear and cruelty exposed by the popular Press. These could be written off against the patience, courage, and decency of the soldiers and others. War profiteers

dishonour themselves, not their country. A country is only dishonoured by the deliberate acts of its effective rulers. We learned early that the wilful propaganda of lies is a necessary part of modern warfare—that is, the wilful poisoning of the minds of a whole people. No doubt it is also part of the normal process of government, whether in a dictatorship or in the conditions of an uneducated democracy. The habit formed by modern statesmen of writing their memoirs is useful in so far as it provides neat marginal illustrations of Cavour's words: 'What scoundrels we should be if we did for ourselves the things we are prepared to do for Italy.'

I have more than once had to realise—always with astonishment—that to become known as a pacifist is to incur the suspicion of being unpatriotic or un-English. It never fails to astonish me, only because I should have thought that less than a minute's reflection on the manner and effects of modern warfare would be long enough to fill every lover of England with the sharpest and most overwhelming anxiety to avert war. But belief still lingers that war is a proper expression of the fighting instincts of men. These romantic Old Believers have not grasped the fact that the machine has revolutionised the nature of war as completely as that of other human activities. War has become slaughter by numbers. Against machines which

deliver poison gas or a rain of white-hot steel human courage is as unavailing as human flesh. On the active side, it should be added that there is nothing heroic in dropping bombs on a city, and if it should be called a patriotic duty that will be a good reason for holding the word 'patriotism' to have become obscene in course of time. Lest it should be supposed that I am moved by nothing more serious than the natural distaste of a mother at the thought of her son being clumsily butchered, let me quote a soldier, Major-General Fuller: 'There is no chivalry in modern war, there is little heroism, there is no pity. . . . This is not war, this is massacre, the ritual of the slaughter-house . . . this foul contest of machines.'

If there were no other argument why an Englishman should hate war for his country, England in 1935 should provide it. The dead are dead, but that incalculable loss—who can tell what we lost?—is not the end of it. The nations are still paying for their reversion to cannibalism, and not least in the persistence of the fears and passions which swayed us in 1914, and the portent of an arrogant and repressive nationalism.

With my mind on this, I doubt whether I am eager to call myself patriotic when I read that the word has been called out by an armaments' manufacturer to describe the success of his earnest efforts to sell his wares abroad. Now, I have no objection,

on the score of honesty, to a man who says: 'My trade is making shells and guns for killing men and I intend to sell these at a profit to any nation which is prepared to pay for them; I am not responsible if my guns are at some time turned against my own people, even it may be against my own son; this has happened in the recent past, it may happen again, it is unfortunate, but I am not responsible.' I may be unwilling to share in the profits of his trade, from my squeamish dislike of the human butcher's business. But that he should look to be praised as a patriot for his profitable neutrality is too much for me. If this is patriotism, then I feel none.

And yet I think I do. It is in my mind that no one truly loves England without he also hates war and distrusts the men who make a profit from it. I cannot respect the writer of a letter refusing to read a book I edited lately because (said he) he 'understood it was anti-war and all this anti-war talk is anti-English'—it seems to me an awkward sort of love, nearer vanity, which this man and others who are of his opinion bear their country.

So, I am a Little Englander on one side (the left—the side of the heart), and on the other I try to be a good European. Much good it will do us now to talk of Isolation, standing on the edge of a continent which can be overrun in a few hours by air. Nor can I find anything comfortable in the equally-

irrational fantasy of building (only for our defence) more aeroplanes than every other country is building (for its defence). . . . I am astounded when I read such words as these, which appeared in an Isolationist newspaper lately: 'Britain should resolutely refuse to enter any international conference the majority of which were foreigners.' For ill or good England is a close part of Europe and will remain so until aeroplanes are forbidden to be built. In Europe the majority of the nations have the misfortune to be foreigners, and close enough to us to make living with them uncomfortable and dangerous, if it is not regulated. In such circumstances we ought to sit in conference with them the whole time, for our safety's sake. The apostles of Isolation, as resolute to avoid knowing the truth as the village that voted the earth was flat, quaver: 'Don't interfere, keep out, avoid trouble'—as if troubles which live in the same room with us can be avoided by the gesture of turning our backs. It does not matter what political colours the different countries choose to wear, and even if they should all be Soviet Republics, consultations and the constraint of offences will still be necessary in so crowded an area. My pride and belief in England are such that I would rather she took more, not less, part in the business of Europe, interfered more often, and spoke—with the certainty of being listened to—in a less lawyer-like and equivocal voice.

I have another touchstone for patriots, but little pleasure in using it. When I meet a man (or woman), not blind or a cripple or in any other way cut off from the use of his senses, and find him less than passionately willing to change the social condition of this country I consider that he is only as good a patriot as my cat, who is satisfied so long as she has her own ration of cream and warmth. There are in this country too many unfortunate children—undernourished, shoddily clothed, living in dirt. At an age when other children are playing games and passing to another stage in their education these have begun some employment which, if a gently-nourished boy or girl were set to it, you would think unchildlike. How is it possible to love one's country and not feel bitterly ashamed of the familiar cruelty which gives to one child the most exquisite care and to another, no less sensitive or intelligent, squalor, poor insufficient food, and early toil? All the reasons by which we account for this piece of savagery do not excuse it.

There is no excuse. If the best milk, clean air, daily baths, warmth, are thought necessary for any child they are necessities for all. To rob even one child of what is necessary to his growth is considered detestable, except if the child should be too poor to be worth much trouble. There may be, there are, reasons why many children's lives are poisoned at their birth—by their crime of being

born to women who are without money. But there is no excuse. It sometimes seems that complacency is the only sin. Certainly it is the meanest.

Suppose a visitor from another country, eager to know England by sight, and you his guide. It is not only to save him the trouble of holding his nose that you will avoid taking him into the poorer quarters of the town. Most of us, though not all—a shipowner in my own town commented on the Welfare Centre that poor women are all sluts and ought to be left to their diseases—are ashamed of our slums. The district of Westminster contains some buildings which will charm the visitor, as well as houses with ‘husband, wife and five young children living in two rooms. Two children have died there. The rooms are infested with rats. A dog is kept in the room while the children sleep to protect them.’ Again, Kensington is considered a very healthy quarter, but not by the basement dwellers of the Portobello Road: ‘there were five families in this house—approximately thirty people—with one working water closet. Sewage water comes into some of these cellars, forced back from the sewers, and . . . for every three cases of infantile rheumatism in the southern half of the borough there are forty-three cases in the north.’ Here is an East End priest speaking: ‘Why is it that the whole horrible thing—these vile, leaky, verminous houses, these insane conditions of un-

speakable overcrowding—still goes on? For it does go on!’

And if you pull down all the ‘vile, leaky, verminous houses’ you still have left a monstrous sarcoma of nasty streets, not insanitary by the book, but congested, airless, and sordidly ugly. The England I could be content with will not be built until every unlovely street and quarter has been razed and in their place rise cities and towns planned by architects, engineers, artists, and doctors working together. There are not wanting heads and hands to make this dream real. Why should we be satisfied with less?

And how long will this country bear the burden of its ruined areas?—‘towns such as Jarrow, where only one man in every four has a job. . . . Friends and relations cannot help one another, because all are straitened in the same way. Everything superfluous has been pawned or sold by the time unemployment has continued for many months, and the necessities of life are largely worn out or broken. In Jarrow, where many shops are shut, you may see the rare sight of even a pawnshop closed. These people are living on the very margin. Clothes come largely from charity. Underclothes are rare. The men are not starving, but they are permanently hungry.’ (*The Times*, March 21st, 1934.)

If Jarrow had been the only town in England

where men and women do not know what it is to have enough to eat, we should be shocked into sending them in food, as we are shocked by a mine disaster into opening relief funds. But since it is only one of many towns and villages without a future and since no town or city is without men who 'are permanently hungry' and mothers who starve themselves to have a little more for their children, we have become used to the thought that a great number of our fellow-countrymen are dying of the slow cancer of poverty.

It is scarcely even a thought to us. We call it a problem, debate it and set up commissions to study the incidence of hunger, as if it were something less than a beastly cruelty for some to eat well while others are tormented by half-hunger. Jarrow and the rest are diseased cells in the body of England, and this disease is caused by stupidity and social senility; it is a plain disgrace to us. We should be ashamed of it, and ought to go on being ashamed until England is clean of her leprosy.

In the end, and because I have imagined that there are fewer complacent people in England than anywhere, and because I believe that the English are the subtlest and most nearly civilised of peoples, I grudge the waste involved in our social disorder. Until all children, without respect of their birth, are brought up with the same care for their health and comfort, and given during their early years the

same training in mental and bodily exercises, we cannot know what talent and what aptitudes we have at disposal in our nation. There is no sense or reason in a method of living which compels one boy to work like a galley slave to get himself an education and hands it to another whether he wants it or not, and whether he can benefit himself or his country by it or not. Education ought certainly to be entirely classless—that is, no child should be given a worse education than he is fitted for. But Heaven forbid that our present methods of education should be taken as a model. Half the disorders we suffer from, individual and social, begin in the divorce of work from pleasure and dignity—I would have every child taught a craft and the proper use of his body, before I troubled his mind overmuch.

Not long since I spent a short time at Wincham Hall, near Northwich, a place where a fine effort is being made for workless men. Among these men, of whom some have been out of work already five or six years, are several of the same age as my son. What conceivable wisdom or justice is there in a society which leaves these boys to rot when they cannot find work, while my son continues a prolonged education at Cambridge? Some among them showed an intelligence which could have been used; all could have given England something. It would be comfortable to think that every child

sent out to work at fifteen deserved no kinder fate. Comfortable and a lie. A few weeks ago a working girl who had been backward from childhood and 'appeared to be of extremely low intelligence' was discovered by the Institute of Medical Psychology in London to possess 'exceptional mental gifts.'

England will never again be a happy and secure nation until every child is born fortunate because born in England. The misery and hopelessness of one section of our people, the dissatisfaction of others, are a proof not that we are a poor nation but that we do not know how to use our riches. Our biological and technical inventiveness have increased to such a degree that the next generation might be the first not to know the smell of poverty. There need not be one other young man cheated, as those young men at Wincham have been cheated, of their proper life; not one other child to die from trying to live in leaky verminous houses or to be reared in vile surroundings; not one mother left to die from want of food, as Mrs. Weaver died last year in this rich country.

If we had the will to do this, we could do it. We could begin this same day. But in this day Englishmen are not valued so high as machines. Too many of them are without even the hope of life. This frightful comment comes from one of the young men at Wincham on a speech made to them by a visitor: 'Much good it does talking to

us about future generations—we can't marry or have children.'

I am sworn not to cease talking and writing about these things. First, since there is no reason other than lack of common will why England should not become a nation of free men and women, not indeed equal in skill or quality but all equally apt to use such skill and quality as they have to the best purpose. Anything less is an open cheat. I cannot respect any man who is content to enjoy a comfort and security that others of his countrymen have not. The will to see England rebuilt, her every child happy, well reared, faithfully and wisely bred, is the only degree of patriotism I understand. Any colder or more neutral sort is apt to look no different from the anxiety to preserve the comforts and privileges of a class.

There is no doubt, but an England reformed at home would be attentively listened to abroad. 'Why else was this Nation chos'n before any other, ~~what~~ out of her as out of *Sion* should be proclam'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all *Europe*.'

1935.

This essay was written for Fact, for an issue called 'Writing in Revolt'. It was a singularly inapt title—foolish, too: writers may revolt, though surely not in a vacuum, but writing? Neither the theory nor the examples offered could have been labelled revolutionary in any proper sense of that bundle-word. This essay is as mild, orthodox and one-sided as the annual conference of the Conservative Party, and much more so than any Mothers' Meeting. But then a Mothers' Meeting, in Yorkshire at any rate, could give points in revolutionary outlook to any nest of singing rebels in Bloomsbury or elsewhere.

New Documents

I BELIEVE we should do well to give up talking about proletarian literature and talk about socialist literature instead—and mean by it writing concerned with the lives of men and women in a world which is changing and being changed. A socialist must be intimately concerned with this change; he must be struggling continually to understand it. His writing must reflect his experience of it and his understanding of his experience. And since the change is world wide, and is taking place on innumerable levels at once and all the time, the difficulty of attempting to write anything on the scale of *War and Peace* is so great as to make it unlikely that it will be written—yet. The difficulty excuses none of us for retreating into a world made artificially static by excluding from it all the factors of change and the rumour of the real world.

Literature concerned with change and the changing world is concerned with revolution, and with all the stages of revolutionary action. The type of socialist hero is a revolutionary (required reading is Ralph Fox's *The Novel and the People*),

and here, if he is a novelist, the writer is not likely to be able to create a revolutionary hero under the eyes of the living Dimitroff. Even Tolstoj, writing fifty years after Waterloo, is not able to make a figure of Napoleon; Stendhal, a greater writer, and a contemporary, does not try. It is perhaps necessary (this is not the place to consider it) for a really great figure to become diminished in time before he can be re-created by the imagination, which can tackle lesser men (a Baldwin, for example) easily enough. Note that in Ralph Bates's novels his heroes are least convincing when they are behaving as revolutionaries. In quarrelling, in gathering olives, in enduring, they appear as whole men. Compare the hero of Malraux's *Days of Contempt* with the figure of Dimitroff; he is a shadow. Compare him with himself—he begins to be alive only when he leaves the prison and is talking to his wife.

The use of the term 'proletarian novel' suggests, quite falsely, that socialist literature ought to concern itself only or mainly with working-class life. In fact, a novel about a Lord Invernairn, written from full insight into what this man actually is doing, a novel which exposed him, laid him open, need not bring on to the stage a single one of the people who do not exist for him as human beings. It would still be socialist literature. The process of change, of decay, of growth, is taking place

everywhere all the time: it does not matter where you open up the social body if you know what you are looking for.

This misconception is not the worst of it. The worst is a dreadful self-consciousness which seizes the middle-class writer who hears the command to sell all he has and write a proletarian novel. He discovers that he does not even know what the wife of a man earning two pounds a week wears, where she buys her food, what her kitchen looks like to her when she comes into it at six or seven in the morning. It has never happened to him to stand with his hands in greasy water at the sink, with a nagging pain in his back, and his clothes sticking to him. He (or she) actually has to take a look into the kitchen to know what it smells and looks like. At that he does not know as much as the woman's forefinger knows when it scrapes the black out of a crack in the table or the corner of a shelf.

The impulse that made him want to know is decent and defensible. If he happens to have been born and brought up in Kensington the chances are that he has never lifted the blind of his own kitchen at six in the morning, with thoughts in his mind of tumbled bed-clothes, dirty grates, and the ring of rust on the stove. But there is something very wrong when he has to contort himself into knots in order to get to know a worker, man or

woman. What is wrong is in him, and he cannot blame on to his upbringing what is really a failure of his own will; it is still clenched on his idea of himself, given to him by that upbringing, but now to be cast off as the first condition of growth. Too much of his energy runs away in an intense interest in and curiosity about his feelings. 'What things I am seeing for the first time! What smells I am enduring! There is the woman raking ashes with her hands and here I am watching her!' This self-centred habit is not peculiar to the middle-class writer, but it is natural to him. If, as a child, he had escaped from the nursery and been found in some Hoxton backyard he would have been bathed and disinfected and made conscious of having run an awful danger, much as though he had been visiting savages. The mental attitude persists. Breeding will out!

The first thing a socialist writer has to realise is that there is no value in the emotions, the spiritual writhings, started in him by the sight, smell, and touch of poverty. The emotions are no doubt unavoidable. There is no need to record them. Let him go and pour them down the drain.

The writer living in one moment of time and in one society, and perpetually conscious of another trying to break through, has been set a task which calls for special discipline and effort. He must enquire into a revolution, but he cannot create a

revolutionary hero as impressive as the still living Dimitroff. If he could, he would be mentally of the size of Dimitroff and, at the present instant, that would lay on him the compulsion to work in other ways than as a writer. He must not, he ought not to indulge himself in self-analysis, since that is to nail himself inside his own small ego at a moment when what is individual to each man is less real, less actual, than that which he shares with every other man—insecurity, the need to become a rebel for the sake of human dignity. What then should he do?

A task of the greatest value, urgent and not easy, is waiting to be done. George Orwell has begun on it in the first half of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The instinct which drives a writer to go and see for himself may be sound. If a writer does not know, if his senses and imagination have not told him, what poverty smells like, he had better find out. Even if in the end he prefers to write about Invernairn or Krupp. But if he goes for his own sake, for some fancied spiritual advantage to be got from the experience, he had better stay at home: his presence in Wigan or Hoxton is either irrelevant or impudent. He must go for the sake of the *fact*, as a medical student carries out a dissection, and to equip himself, not to satisfy his conscience or to see what effect it has on him. His mind must remain cool; he must be able to

give an objective report, neither superficial nor slickly dramatic. And, for pity's sake, don't let us have any 'slices of life' in the manner of the Naturalists of the 'eighties. In their determination to show life up they became as sentimental, as emotionally dishonest, as Miss So-and-so 'embosoming freely' with her readers in the fiction columns of the women's magazines. For their own purposes they counterfeit reality as obtusely as she does.

The conditions for the growth of a socialist literature scarcely exist. We have to create them. We need documents, not, as the Naturalists needed them, to make their drab tuppenny-ha'penny dramas, but as charts, as timber for the fire some writer will light to-morrow morning. The detailed and accurate presentment, rather than the presentation, of this moment, and this society. A new *Comédie Humaine*—offered to us without the unnecessary distorting gloss of the writer's emotions and self-questionings. Writers should be willing to go and live for a long enough time at one of the points of departure of the new society. To go, if you like, into exile. Without feeling heroic, or even adventurous, or curious about their own spiritual reactions. Willing to sink themselves for the time, so that they become conduits for a feeling which is not personal, nor static.

They might, for instance, tell us what is stirring,

if anything, in one of those Durham mining villages about which a staid report in *The Times* says that 'no hope exists for thousands of men and boys ever to lead a normal working life again'. A report made by two women doctors to the Council of Action on Motherhood in the Special Areas of Durham and Tyneside remarks, 'It was amazing that in this country people should be living in such dens, that mothers should go through their pregnancies there and infants be born.' I don't know who reads these reports with their ghastly 'cases'. They are not documents in the proper sense of the word; they are not full enough; they do not give the essentials of speech and action. They could not: the observation, however acute, is made from outside, too briefly, and as a stranger would report upon strangers after an hour's visit. We do not see the woman stripping the filthy, bug-ridden wallpaper from the thin wall of her attic; nor the pregnant woman waiting her turn for the lavatory which serves eight families (forty people); nor the gesture of the woman setting on the table the little pie she has bought for her consumptive child; nor the workless man looking at the soles of his shoes when he comes home. It is necessary that a writer should have lived with these things for him to record them as simply and coldly, even brutally, as if he chooses he can describe what has been familiar to him from his infancy. Something can

be discovered in an hour's visit, but not the quick. Not the seed, if it exists here, of a different growth.

It is not necessary—in a great many instances it would be impossible or undesirable—for a writer to work alone. He might work with other writers, if it were decided to report on a district or a town (see the American classic in this sort, *Middletown*). He can enlist the help of social workers to supplement his own experience of such specifically modern horrors as the effects on girls and young women of 'rationalisation' in the factory. (When Charlie Chaplin goes mad, in a recent film, unable to stop himself jerking at anything that looks like the top of a screw, he is caricaturing a horrid reality: the girls from one of these rationalised factories cannot keep their hands still; they walk round the club room nipping off the heads of flowers, turning off the heating; they jerk and twitch and scream.)

A writer living in a Nottinghamshire mining village could not possibly do his job properly without the help of confidential reports from the workers themselves which he would have to wait for and deserve by his behaviour. He could not expect the wife of a miner living in one of the new 'compounds' to tell him at sight how she likes shopping in an employer-owned store. Why, he might be in the pay of the Economic League.

The connections and activities of this organisation . deserve a document to themselves—more than one.)

A well-placed novelist might bring out a double-sided record: one day or one week in the life of a family of five living in one of the wealthier residential districts of the West End (if he or she can find one which has so far forgotten itself as to breed), set down opposite the life during the same length of time of a similar (in ages, size, etc.), of a Paddington, Hoxton, Lambeth family. Again, this might be team work.

The number of documents to be got is infinite. How are they to be presented? This is the crux. A journalist can observe and report. No writer is satisfied to write journalism, nor is this what is wanted—visits to the distressed areas in a motor-car. Nor must the experience, the knowledge waited for and lived through, be counterfeited, in the sense of making up a story or a novel on the basis of facts collected (e.g. *The Stars Look Down*, by Cronin). Perhaps the nearest equivalent of what is wanted exists already in another form in the documentary film. As the photographer does, so must the writer keep himself out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the fact from a striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle. The narrative must be sharp, compressed, concrete. Dialogue must be short—a seizing of the significant, the revealing word. The emotion should spring directly from the fact. It must not be squeezed from it by the writer, running forward

with a 'When I saw this, I felt, I suffered, I rejoiced. . . .' His job is not to tell us what he felt, but to be coldly and industriously presenting, arranging, selecting, discarding from the mass of his material to get the significant detail which leaves no more to be said, and implies everything.

And for goodness' sake let us get some fun out of it. Nothing is less to our taste, and less realist, than the inspissated gloom of Naturalism. A novel by Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara*, offers itself as a model—this tragic, bitter story of a village is extremely funny, and sticks faster in the memory by it. Let us write decent English, too; not American telegraphese. Social documents are familiar in our literature. The sermons of preaching friars are still alive where the preacher threw in a scene that was under his eyes as he walked about—often a savage indictment of poverty created by greedy merchants and landlords.

For the sake of compression—the field to be covered is, after all, enormous—and for the sake of sharpness, much must be left out that a writer will be tempted to put in. For one thing, 'atmosphere'. It has been overdone, too—all those novels in which infinite pains have gone to the evocation of rain and moonlight, novels 'set' in Cornwall, in Sussex, in Paris and Patagonia. For another thing, the static analysis of feeling, and thought. No more peeling of the onion to strew

the page with layer after layer. No stream of consciousness—that famous stream which we pretend to see flowing, as in the theatre we agree to pretend that the stream on the back-cloth flows. No commentary—the document is a comment. No æsthetic, moral, or philosophic enquiry—that is, none which is not implicit. To say this is not to say that a novel such as *The Root and The Flower* is of no value. It is of the greatest value and it is concerned with those human values we are trying to save. It offers—in a form entirely unsuitable to our present purpose—a criticism of social values which is just and suggestive. Its method is useless to us—for a good reason. We must be field workers in a field no smaller than England, our criticism of values implied in the angle from which we take our pictures. By choosing this detail, this word, rather than another from the mass offered us, we make our criticism, our moral judgements.

Writers write to be read. If they are not read, by as many people as will do to keep them vigorously alive, they have failed *as writers*. People will listen even to what is disagreeable to them if the speaker's tone takes them by the ear. The Naturalists flung tear-sodden lumps of raw life in the public's face and complained because the public went home to amuse itself in its own way. There is a technical job to be done. It can't be done until the instruments have been made and improved, as astronomy

had to wait on a lens. How to make people listen to what they don't want to hear. How not to bore the people who do want to hear. If they want to hear, you say, they'll take anything. But why should they? Why should they be bored by what is nothing more or less than incompetence or amateurishness? It is not a question of setting out to be a best-seller—if that is what you want there are shorter and easier ways—but of learning a craft. Again the relevant comparison is with the documentary film. It takes a shapened and disciplined mind to handle a mass of material in such a way that only the significant details emerge. We're confronted by the extreme difficulty of finding phrases which are at once compressed and highly suggestive. It's hardly a job for an amateur unless he happens to be a genius. (When a genius arrives he can and will look after himself.)

The isolation of writers from each other is almost as deadly as their isolation from the life of farmers, labourers, miners and other men on whom the life of the nation depends. If something of this unnatural apartness can be broken down, by writers working together, by their coming into relation with their fellow-men and women, they may, between them, provide the conditions, the warmth, for a new literature. We have been attending the death-bed of an old one for some time; a birth is about due. It may actually be

the birth of a great writer, and the documents we have collected, the activity we have stirred up, will form the conditions into which he is born. They will shape him and he will use them. A great writer has more than one father and mother, as well as more than one nurse.

One technical difficulty remains to be solved. The solution may turn up one day, in the course of the experiments going on all the time. This is the frightful difficulty of expressing, in such a way that they are at once seen to be intimately connected, the relations between things (men, acts) widely separated in space or in the social complex. It has been done in poetry. At certain levels of the mind we see and feel connections which we know rationally in another way. In dreams things apparently distinct are seen to be related (but Surrealism is not the solution). We may stumble on the solution in the effort of trying to create the literary equivalent of the documentary film.

1937.

This essay was first delivered as a lecture in Leeds University. I think it is not very rhetorical—fortunately. On re-reading it I am startled by the change which has come over my mind in the short time since I wrote it. I have not, since then, altered any of the convictions that have been growing in my mind since I went up, a raw schoolgirl, to Leeds University. What has altered is the stress which, dictated to us by our emotions, we lay on this and that aspect of a belief. My mind moves with extreme slowness. I trudge along, aware sometimes that the stones are vexing my feet, at others only aware of the form of the country, and unexpectedly find that I have moved into new country.

When I had given this lecture, a friend, to whose wit and intellect I am always on my knees, was angry with me for my critical (as I had hoped) attack on Surrealism. It would only, she said, give satisfaction to those persons who damn every new growth in art, hating and fearing it because it is new. Now, it is true that my comments on Surrealism in a lecture not devoted to it were incomplete. I had a great deal more to say, a great deal more I could say if I had time. But I cannot admit that one should not tell the truth as one sees it, even though it will make the wrong people rejoice—for the wrong reasons. It is the old quarrel of expediency and justice, or truth. Very many writers have agreed that they will only speak their minds when it is expedient to do so. To further

a cause, a good cause, they will suppress others and themselves. I do not accept this. I never did, and I do so now less than ever. I am not competent to criticise publicly Surrealist painting—though I will do so in private with a good heart. But I am competent to criticise and to hold views on Surrealist writers. If they are right and I am wrong they are not harmed by my disapproval. They are not defenceless either. I may well be wrong. But my criticism is reasonable and pondered; it is not instinctive prejudice. My instinct, indeed, is always to defend what is new and a rebellion against authority. Thus I have worked for my enjoyment of the work of certain modern musicians, and certain modern painters. I should be willing to go on working to enjoy Surrealist literature if, after trial, my mind did not warn me how little worth the effort it is. This, at least, is my truth, and I should do wrong, I think, to suppress it.

The Novel in Contemporary Life

WE all know that a new, and to many people a very disturbing, influence has begun to move in literature during the last ten or fifteen years. That is a misleading way to put it. What I ought to say is that certain changes and threats of change in the world have forced themselves on the notice of writers with such energy that whether we want to or not we have not been able to ignore them. A great many writers do want to ignore them. It would be just as easy to ignore a thunderstorm when you are out in it. Something which has been going on in the world for a long time has reached a stage that alters everything. So that even those people who would rather not have been involved are involved against their will. It rains alike on the just and the unjust, on the unmitigated best-seller and the unmitigable serious writer. A new Battle of the Books has begun.

I attended what must have been one of the first, if not the first, private meeting at which a number of writers, who had come to see what it was about, were told that it was their duty not simply as persons but *as writers* to play an active political part. Some

of them were bewildered. A well-known and rather prosperous novelist kept on saying to me in a distressed voice: 'But do they mean I ought to give up art and write only propaganda?' Actually he had not much to give up, but it seemed worth while trying to reassure him. Propaganda is not the direct aim of the novelist.

Since that afternoon in London, writers have been recruited into companies and on to committees, they have been pressed for this side or that—always as writers. 'It's your pen we want.' It is impossible to discuss the contemporary novel unless you realise immediately that something is happening to it which is happening at the same time to every other human activity. In certain European countries the process has gone so far that a writer finds himself being interfered with both as writer and as human being. If he has the misfortune to be on the wrong side—or only to seem to be on the wrong side—he may be chased out of his country. Or shot, as Lorca was in Spain. Or, as Erich Mühsam was, tortured first and then murdered, in a concentration camp. Or, if left alive, asked to submit to a censorship which has the merit of being open. And no other merit.

To put it shortly, the novel is being affected profoundly, and not in any simple way, by the social and political climate of the present day. This has nothing whatever to do with the argument,

a quite silly and barren argument, about politics and the novel. To ask: 'Should politics come into the novel?' is only idiotic. Any conceivable thing can come into a novel if it comes in on the novelist's own terms. The change which is taking place in the world, at various levels, of which the political is only one, is of such violence that the novel cannot help being affected. It would be affected even if every novelist decided to pretend that nothing is happening. If you are in the rain you get wet.

Let us try to look at the English novel in 1937 as if we were not engaged, far too many of us, in writing it, and the others in reading it or being bored or irritated by it into reading something else—or going to the pictures. The first thing that strikes any critic is the immense competence and immense unimportance of the bulk of new novels. The test of a novel's importance is the response we make to it. It rouses certain impulses in us and satisfies them. The impulse may be weak and worthless, and our response negligible. Or we may receive a satisfaction that enriches and enlarges our minds. Unless the novel we are reading moves us in this way its value is no greater than that of a box of chocolates. And not different. You can say, 'I am a great reader of novels,' and mean exactly as much as you would mean by saying, 'I eat a lot of chocolates.'

When you look back on a year's reading of fifty

or a hundred novels—neatly-written, amusing, exciting—of how many can you say: ‘It changed me. Because of it I now feel more acutely, I see more deeply and understand better what happens to me’? Of the novels which do not pass this test it is useless to talk. We might just as well, just as profitably, discuss the merits of different kinds of chocolate. And the causes which have led to our having innumerable brands of chocolate to choose from are also responsible for the flood of competent neatly-written—and the rest of it—novels. We have become foolishly sophisticated because it was profitable to supply us with these luxuries—and in the absence of any check on our tastes or any standards except wilfully material ones. The novels are unimportant. The social standards to which they bear witness are not—but that is another question. And another aspect of the change taking place in the world.

Let us see what has been happening to certain novelists. One, who was undoubtedly a great artist, and a man who lived as he wrote, with the insight and honesty of genius, has died. D. H. Lawrence. He died in February 1930, a little before authors began to be exiled, enlisted, or shot, and before the change of which we have been speaking became so obvious and menacing that even popular novelists can see it. Lawrence, who was never a popular novelist, was aware of it almost from the

beginning of his life as a writer. Again and again in his novels he gives expression to his overwhelming sense that our material and mechanical civilisation has reached its limits, that it is going to be destroyed by forces it has repressed, that we are at last being presented with the bill for our past cruelty, greed, folly, for the ugliness we have wilfully created. 'We have no future; neither for our hopes nor our aims nor our art,' he says. 'Vitality, the human race is dying. It is like a great uprooted tree, with its roots in the air. We must plant ourselves again in the universe.' Lawrence died just in time, before his certainty—it was a personal certainty—of the continuity of human experience could be damaged by what is happening in 1937. It is one thing to foresee chaos. It is another to live in it.

Now take Virginia Woolf. Her latest novel, *The Years*, is an almost involuntary witness to the defeat of an artist whose success has depended on her being able to find in the outer world an image, a symbol, to which she can attach her remarkable capacity for feeling. Whenever, in her books, Mrs. Woolf has been able to convey, sharply and immediately, the impressions received by her senses, the truthfulness and value of her work are beyond question. She has an exquisite sensibility to sensuous impressions. Once she ventures outside the range of this sensibility she seems to have no feeling for

reality at all. A first reading of *The Years* is a bitter disappointment—the mechanical repetition of old images, the sentimentality which takes the place of emotion in these almost non-existent characters, the poverty of the thought. After a second and third reading one realises that the emotion is there. But it is an emotion of which the writer herself was perhaps not conscious. A sense of deadness, of falsity. These people give back a hollow tone when Mrs. Woolf touches them because they are hollow. They are finished. They are Lawrence's 'uprooted tree, with its roots in the air'. They have no future. Even the past is not alive in them. This book was praised and blamed not for what it is. Its truth is in the monotony, the staleness.

Another of our best novelists has ceased to write novels. Can we—in the case of E. M. Forster—assume that he finds it impossible to transmute into fiction, into his civilised and essentially sane fiction, his knowledge of what is going on in the world? To a sensibility as rare as Mrs. Woolf's he adds an ironical intellect in complete control of itself. We know that he is passionately alive to what is going on. Two years ago he took the trouble to attend the first international Congress of writers for the defence of culture, held in Paris. Possibly the speech he made there answers our question about him. 'You will say, perhaps,' he said, 'that if a

new war breaks out, writers of the liberal and individualist type, like Mr. Aldous Huxley and myself, will be simply swept aside. I am sure that we will be swept aside, and I consider as very possible a new war. . . . This said, my rôle and the rôle of those with the same sentiments as myself, is a temporary rôle. We must continue to potter about with our old tools until the moment when everything falls about our ears. When everything crashes, nothing will serve any more. After—if there is an after—the task of civilisation will be taken up by men whose spiritual training will be different from mine.’ This courage, this personal integrity, of a great writer, is nevertheless not the mood in which it seems worth while making the effort to write a novel. Novels are not written pottering about with old tools, waiting stoically for the roof to fall in.

Nor, to look now at James Joyce, by a laboured and mechanical manipulation of language. The trouble with *Work in Progress* is not that it is obscure. Obscurity may spring from the writer’s struggles to convey, under intense emotional pressure, some profound experience. The words are chosen, and perhaps forced together and distorted, by the creative need itself. Even if we had not been told how Mr. Joyce works up the text of *Work in Progress*, underlining the puns, multiplying and cramming in the allusions, we should

have known that his interest is not in what he is saying. It is in the building up of this spurious monument of verbal effects. Spurious because it is mechanical and deliberate. It is not dictated by an inner necessity. Some of the effects are charming, some are extremely interesting. But the total effect is of stupendous dullness, like a dozen mechanical pianos playing Scriabine at once. One can scarcely imagine anything more like Purgatory.

If this has been the effect of the climate of the last ten years on writers of genius, what has happened to a highly talented novelist, to Aldous Huxley? He has not only become an uncompromising pacifist, but forces himself to work actively for his faith. He makes speeches and writes pamphlets. His horror at what is going on in the world has driven him on to the platform at the Albert Hall. The hero of his latest novel is a pacifist. It is true that this novel is not intrinsically more satisfying than others of Mr. Huxley's. As a writer he has been half strangled by his acute consciousness of himself, his mind and his senses. His response to life, to experience, is arrested above the point where he would have come into immediate contact with what is fundamental and enduring in human beings. A much less clever, clumsier, more slipshod novelist, like Dickens, will come nearer the essential truth of a character. What is significant about Mr. Huxley in 1937 is to be discovered more in

what is happening to the man than in anything that has happened to the novelist.

For the rest, our best-selling novelists continue to write the books we expect from them. And now and then, in the torrent of new novels, you get one like *The Stars Look Down*—in which industry and talent combined with an acute news-sense to produce a book which has something more than the vividness of a journalist's account of an accident in a mine. You should notice that it had precisely the effect of journalism. It was eagerly read, by people who felt that they wanted to know the truth about a disaster like Gresford. It disturbed, it shocked, it interested—and it has been forgotten. Its author is now, with equal skill and vivacity, telling the truth about doctors.

Look at the torrent of new novels as it pours down and rushes past you. A name catches your eye, you snatch at it—it is gone. You read and enjoy a book. A month later, if you speak of it, no one remembers its name. The effect, in spite of the competence we have noticed, is of complete ineffectiveness. There are so many novels, and so many well-composed novels, and scarcely one a year that makes any dent on our consciousness. This peculiar ineffectiveness shows itself in two ways. It is felt by novelists themselves. Take two of the liveliest among the young writers—Arthur Calder-Marshall and C. Day Lewis. Not only

would neither of these young men try to live on his earnings as a novelist, but neither of them relies on novels to convey all he has to say about the world. Nor, you notice, does Mr. Huxley.

The other sign is precisely the fact of the torrent itself. I can think of as many as half a dozen novelists of intellectual distinction and sensibility who produce a novel a year. It is praised, and in a month it is forgotten. I think of writers like V. S. Pritchett and Gerald Bullett. Or of a novel like *The Root and The Flower*, by L. H. Myers. This remarkable book is concerned with those human values which underlie any form of society. It is a mature and subtle work. The torrent swept it into the oblivion of a few, a very few bookshelves.

One begins to see that in 1937 the novel is attacked and defeated from two sides. There is the suspicion, arising first in the minds of intelligent and serious novelists, that the novel is inadequate for what they want to say. And there is the economic defeat. Let us take this first, because it is simpler. Take a ludicrously simple illustration. A few weeks since one of the most intelligent literary agents in America invited me to send her synopses of as many long stories as I cared to write. 'American editors,' she wrote, 'are now willing to print the more serious, literary type of story.' Feeling sceptical but encouraged, I sent her the outline of four stories. She warned me immediately

not to think of writing any of them. American editors, she said, do not approve of illegitimate children, are violently prejudiced against stories in which a writer appears as a character, do not like certain subjects to be treated ironically, or directly, and prefer that a great many others should not be treated at all. It's not in itself of the least importance that in order to sell a story to a magazine you must pretend that the world is something other than it is. You need not write for the magazines. But the fact is that you are not merely shut out of this market. What is called magazine fiction does not remain in its proper place, between the advertisements of face cream and the pictures of what Arnold Bennett called 'fabulously expensive women'. It emerges as a serious competitor. Not only as a competitor. Its influence is much more insidious. It creates a taste for itself, it fixes a standard of popular success. Realise that magazine fiction tends, not deliberately but inevitably, to create a fictional world which is in keeping with the advertisement columns with their insistence on certain social values—for the most part snob values, appeals to vanity, social snobbery, and fear. This is not a conspiracy on the part of editors, writers, and advertisers. It is business as usual. It is part of the much wider movement of society towards a predominantly urban civilisation, with standards of luxury and leisure not fixed by any criterion of

need or taste but solely by income. Magazine fiction is, in fact, a standardised article. It concerns itself with stereotyped emotions and ideas, stock situations, an outlook on life which does not conflict at any level with the outlook of the big advertisers. D. H. Lawrence has described it. 'The novel, like gossip, can excite spurious sympathies and recoils, mechanical and deadening. The novel can glorify the most corrupt feelings, so long as they are *conventionally* "pure." Then the novel, like gossip, becomes at last vicious, and, like gossip, all the more vicious because it is always ostensibly on the side of the angels.'

Bad money drives out good; bad novels, novels warranted not to disturb, not to create a mood in which the purchase of a new motor-car might seem unnecessary or unimportant, drive out the others. The situation is more difficult for the serious writer now than it was only a dozen or fifteen years ago. A young and completely unknown writer stands very little chance to-day if his work shows signs that he is hopelessly given to writing the sort of novels which will make him an undesirable accompaniment to the snob-appeal of the advertisement pages. He has, of course, to struggle not only against the torrent of standardised fiction, but against tendencies to standardisation in the book market itself. You need only glance at the publishers' advertisements in your Sunday paper to see how .

many publishers now follow the sound business principle that it is better to advertise a few lines—the most popular ones—to the exclusion, and the final extinction, of others. The Book Clubs do their bit to smother the serious, the original, or the unknown novelist. Since they must satisfy the lowest common denominator of taste of their members their standards are fixed for them. The book they choose must help *them*. It must give satisfaction. In short, a novelist in 1937 must have qualities which have nothing to do with honesty, sensibility, and the rest—nothing to do with literature—if he hopes to live by his novels.

So much for the economic defeat. Now look for a moment at the other. At the suspicion, if it is no more, that the novel is inadequate to express all an intelligent writer feels about his times. To know whether this suspicion is just we must know two things. What is the particular job of the novelist—what does he try to do, in writing a novel, which is different from the effort of a painter or a musician? And, is there anything, any condition, or tension, in the society in which he works and lives that makes it difficult or impossible for him to do his job? I am not now speaking of economic difficulties *as such*, as they affect the writer, but of the social complex, the movement of society as a whole—this movement which shows

itself as a process of change, taking place all the time, at different levels, in every country.

The impulse which forces the novelist to write his novels is not in the end different from the one which drives a painter to paint, but it takes a different form and in doing so it deals with a different reality. With a different face of reality. The essential concern of the novel is with men and women *in their times*. With the passions and sympathies of men and women as these penetrate and are penetrated by the powerful social currents of their time. The novel can do other things, and in doing them it may move towards some other art, towards poetry, let us say. The novel is the least rigid of forms, and it is always being pulled and stretched to this side or that by the genius of particular novelists. But if we are to speak of the essential form of the novel, we must think of it as depicting in some way, in any way, the social landscape and climate in which the individual characters move. This can be done in more than one way. It can be done as Balzac does it, or it can be done by so enlarging the individual that society is mirrored in him and in his actions.

So you can say that in order to do his work properly the novelist must be a receiving station for the voices coming from every corner of the society he lives in. He need not report them *directly*, but he must hear them. He must be able

to say to himself: I hear of a death and I hear of a birth; I will show the truth of all these things, so that people may know what is going on, so that they may not cling in their hearts to what is dead, and become deaf and blind to what is living. It is because the novel can do this that it is important. Everything depends on the novelist being sensitive enough to detect the past and the future existing together in the present, and honest enough to turn the light on it, without caring what it reveals.

The first thing the novelist discovers when he turns the light on 1937 is what Lawrence called 'a gap in the continuity of consciousness'. 'The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical.' In the healthy life of a community the way in which men live, their mode of life, should grow out of the past experience of the community and towards a steadily developing future. But our great industrial communities have no roots in the past. A man's work is only connected with his life by his pay envelope. Nor can he believe that he is building his life into the future of his country. The future has shrunk to a narrow personal fear. To-morrow I may be out of work. To-morrow there may be war. In a society which has ceased to understand its past

and is not digging channels into the future there can be no living culture. We are approaching what Henry James called 'the awful doom of general dishumanisation'.

This doesn't mean that there is no new life stirring. It does mean that a society we think of as alive, because we see it moving, is only moving mechanically towards its own death—which may be ours. Those convulsive movements we see are producing the engines, the bombs and the poison gas which will destroy it. But something else is being born. There is a social instinct for self-preservation as well as a personal one. The sharpened senses of the novelist will warn him to find this new life, wherever it is—in a prison, a street, or a manger. Find it, recognise it and bring it gifts.

This process of social change, this new birth, as well as this old death, is the rainy country of the contemporary novel. Whether we see it or not—but the novelist *must* see it—something which is essentially a revolution is going on. In one way or another, the sense, the energy, of this revolution must come through his words. Or else he is not telling the truth about contemporary life. This is nothing to do with putting politics into the novel—nothing to do with propaganda. Propaganda—that is, conscious propaganda—is one use of words and it is not the novelist's use of them. And

politics are only one of the activities of men and women. If they appear in a novel they must do so not as politics but as a human activity, expressed through human passions and deeds. What in effect the novelist says is: Here is the social web I am uncovering for you. Look closely and you will see how men and women work, suffer, rejoice, and die in it, like fishes in water. Look closer still and you will see that the web itself moves, changes, and the human creatures with it.

You now see how very difficult the task of the contemporary novelist is. Like any other intelligent person he has to live on a great many levels of being at once—physical, social, intellectual. But he has to do more than this. He has to reach a point where he can see how these different human activities fit together to form a society which is all the time moving and changing. A novelist does, or ought to do, something more than draw characters in action. He forms a conception of life—such a conception, let us say, as Tolstoi offers in *War and Peace* or Jules Romains in his immense unfinished novel *Men of Good Will*—and he chooses events that will express it. The conception *is* the novel. It is the inner necessity from which the events, the story, grow. The characters spring from these events. They affect them, or try to, and are affected by them. When we criticise a novel we ought not to discuss whether the characters are pleasant or

unpleasant—that is not the business of an intelligent critic. What matters is the writer's conception of life. Is it true or false to the reality, and are the words he uses adequate to express it?

The difficulty, the intense difficulty, of the contemporary novelist is to form an adequate conception of life at this moment when everything is changing. He must know, that is, feel so much, and on so many levels. And he must be able to draw back far enough to see the whole movement in focus, not one aspect distorted out of all proportion to the whole. He sees that there are moments in the history of the human race when what is personal in a man is less important than the fears and hopes, the impulses, he shares with a great many of his fellows. He suspects that this is such a moment. And perhaps he despairs. He thinks: If I am to write about this movement, this change, it will dwarf any men and women I can conceive. It will de-personalise them. Or he chooses—as Day Lewis does in a novel called *The Starting Point*—characters which he hopes will convey by their actions the heights and depths, the terrific disruptive nature of the change. But to do that they would have to be of heroic size—of the size of Lenin, or Krupp. They would have to become the vehicle of impersonal forces while remaining men—like Ulen-spiegel in Charles de Coster's great novel. The characters of *The Starting Point* have not this more

than personal significance. It is perhaps impossible for any contemporary novelist to draw far enough back from what is happening to see it clearly. Clearly enough to recreate it in fiction. If this is so, then the novelist is *defeated* by his times in the widest possible sense of the word. Or perhaps he is defeated by something in human nature. Conceive a novelist with enough mental energy to create a Lenin or a Mussolini. Would he have also the coldness to stand above the battle, collecting and directing his energies into a modern *War and Peace*? I don't know. All one can say is that no such novelist is writing. Unless, when or before his novel is finished, we see that Jules Romains has done it: he is without question a very great novelist; and *Men of Good Will* is, even at this unfinished stage, the largest novel of our time. Or Arnold Zweig. In *Education Before Verdun*, *Sergeant Grischa*, and *The Crowning of a King*, he is working at a degree of imaginative heat which the French writer does not, in any single volume, equal or approach.

The inadequacy of the modern novel to tell us as much as we want to know about the contemporary scene is felt by readers as sharply as by the novelists themselves. So you get the enormous popularity of contemporary memoirs and autobiography, and such books as John Gunther's *Inside Europe*. It is not a weak curiosity but

a vital one which sends people to these books. They hope indeed to enlarge their consciousness by reading them. To feed an appetite which the novel is starving.

Writers have made two false starts—I think they are false—towards a new attitude to life. Take the Surrealists first. It is difficult to give an account in purely intellectual terms of a method—using the word in its widest sense—of writing, which involves a repudiation of the intellect. Or tries to dodge it. Fortunately, Surrealists don't mind explaining and expounding themselves, in rational language. They contradict each other, but one gathers uncertainly that the Surrealist writer tries to find a method of releasing in himself that level of his consciousness which he knows to be the source of inspiration—his subconscious. He wants—to quote Mr. Herbert Read quoting Max Ernst—to break down the barriers between the conscious and the unconscious, so that they will 'meet and mingle and dominate the whole of life.' The Surrealist attitude towards his unconscious is a humble one. He waits on his knees. He generally expresses it with fearful arrogance and defiance, reminding one of a Surrealist image which I read somewhere—'the strident cry of red eggs.'

Many writers and artists are very unpleasant outside their creative work. They must be judged by their work, and in the case of the Surrealists, by

their theories. One aspect of Surrealist theory is entirely respectable and not new. That the artist draws his inspiration from something other than his conscious mind is beyond question. Has anyone ever questioned it? Thus an intelligent and sensitive critic, Mr. Herbert Read, can say: 'Art is more than description or reportage; it is an act of renewal. It renews vision, it renews language; but most essentially it renews life itself by enlarging the sensibility, by making men more conscious of the terror and beauty, the wonder of the possible forms of being.' (*Surrealism*: 1936.) This is as excellent an account of the creative arts as you could wish for, and an orthodox one.

But he goes on to say something else: '... though poets and painters in all ages have clung to a belief in the inspirational and even the obsessional nature of their gifts, repudiating in deeds if not in words the rigid bonds of classical theory, it is only now, with the aid of modern dialectics and modern psychology, in the name of Marx and Freud, that they have found themselves in a position to put their beliefs on a scientific basis, thereby initiating a continuous and deliberate creative activity whose only laws are the laws of its own dynamics.' (*Ibid.*) This says something quite different. It says that with the sanction of Freudian research and the method of thought known as dialectical materialism the artist—writer or painter—has found a new way

to reach and use inspiration. Elsewhere he says: 'Perhaps for the first time in history the artist has become conscious of the springs of his inspiration, is in conscious control of such inspiration. . . .' (*Art and Society*.) This, though I doubt if it means much, is plain enough. But he adds in a footnote: 'The paradox of such conscious control being that its aim is to circumvent the intellect, the normal instrument of conscious control.' We are left bewildered in front of a process which can only be described as the intellect circumventing itself.

Other and less intelligent, but more actively practising Surrealists have given other definitions. ' . . . we know that the surrealist text is a complete submission to the automatism of thought, that the spirit hears its own unconscious voice and that the poet transcribes without the intervention of the controlling reason.' (Georges Huguet in *Surrealism*: 1936.)

Distrust a movement that begins by asking the intellect to circumvent itself. A writer lives in intimate contact with that vast store of feelings, words, images, which we call the unconscious. The great writer penetrates farther, moves about more boldly in it, than his inferiors can do. His degree of success *as a writer* is the degree to which he contrives to disengage himself from this mass of raw material, to draw back from it, so that he is

able to realise, and present in a coherent and intelligible form, the complex tissue of feelings, emotions, thoughts, stirred in him by a particular occasion. By relating a number of feelings to one another, by concentrating a great many experiences into one, he gives a new form and substance to vast tracts of our common human experience. This involves exerting an even greater degree of attention. Becoming more critical, more and more passionately attentive, not more automatic. And this is true even although part of the process we call 'exerting attention' takes place unconsciously. There is an unconscious and a conscious attention at work. Both are part of the same creative impulse; both are essential to writing a novel.

There is already a body of Surrealist literature, in which you can judge what happens when you assist the subconscious to circumvent the intellect. Here is a short poem by one of the better-known French Surrealists, Benjamin Perét. It is called *Honest Folk*.

The quarrel between the boiled 'chicken and the
 ventriloquist
 had for us the meaning of a cloud of dust
 which passed above the city
 like the blowing of a trumpet
 It blew so hard that its bowler hat was trembling
 and its beard stood up on end
 to bite off its nose

It blew so loudly
that its nose cracked open like a nut
and the nut spat out
into the far distance
a little cow-shed
wherein the youngest calf
was selling its mother's milk
in sausage-skin flasks
that its father had vulcanised.

It's very odd how silly the French, who are the most civilised and intelligent people in the world, can be. But this sort of thing is worse than silly, it's spurious. Far from holding out hopes of a revival, a literary renaissance, Surrealism in literature shows every symptom of cultural decay: a shallow sophistication taking the place of maturity, ingenuity in place of a serious purpose, stridency—the strident cry of red eggs, surrender to personal emotions, diffuseness, a laboured and boring self-consciousness.

The other false start is the proletarian novel—so-called. Perhaps it would be truer to say of it not that it hasn't started properly, but that it doesn't exist. There is nothing to which we can point and say: 'This expresses a new mode of feeling, a new attitude.' There are novels about working-class life, good, bad, and indifferent. In all but the inessential details they are exactly like novels about middle-class life. No novelist has

yet succeeded in giving form and a voice to the passion—I am using the word in its scriptural sense—of the worker. Perhaps we are waiting for this novelist to be born. It is possible that he will be born on the dole. It is not so likely that he will be able to write on it.

He must have in himself access not simply to the life of the anonymous worker, at its deepest and least apprehensible level, but the energy to transfer it into words, into the events and characters of a novel. You need not expect this energy in a factory-hand or a dole-fed unemployed man or woman. A novelist born and living in the conditions of another class, without the sensibility to touch reality at the point where it touches the worker, had better not sink his shafts at this spot. Nor is it of the first importance that he should. What is more important for him is that he should wrestle faithfully and ceaselessly with the life of his age until he knows what is essential in it, what is living and what is dead and done-for. When he knows this he can give the things he *is* able to write about a significance they owe to being a part, vivid and undistorted, of a larger world.

This is perhaps the way out for the modern novelist. If he cannot deal with the whole contemporary scene he can take soundings of it. If, let us say, he describes the life of a German refugee in Paris he can tell us what, in 1937, is happening

to human dignity. Or he can take some actual concrete instance from contemporary life—say, a mining village in a ruined area—and write about it in such a way that it breaks into our minds. He can only do this if he realises that his own feelings are not of the faintest importance. That he was shocked, or surprised, or indignant matters as little as if he lost his hat. Less. Perhaps he watches a poor woman, the wife of an unemployed man, giving some little extra food she has got to her half-fed child. He is seized with pity, with rage. He says so, and at once the image of the mother is obscured. The pity, you see, is in the act. Not in what the novelist feels about it. He should feel only an intense anxiety to convey just that gesture, that tone in her voice, that look, of pride and fearfulness, on her face; and as he keeps the image held firmly in his mind a great many feelings will attach themselves to it—feelings which belong perhaps to his own childish memories. His already intense emotion becomes more intense; deeper and wider. It forces him to choose the right words, words that will throw the scene into such relief that it blazes with light. A great writer perhaps has some inborn capacity for detaching himself from his experience. Those of us who are only talented are always falling into the temptation of thinking that our personal emotions, especially when they are intense, are valuable for their own

sake. And most of us write too much and too fast—we are too busy earning a living—to learn this painful discipline which the great writer learns easily.

An intelligent critic has said that the novel, as a form, is finished. I don't accept this. I do accept that there has been, during the present century, a cultural decline—the causes are social and economic—which affects the novel as sharply as every other literary form. An intelligent reader, looking at the year's novels, has some excuse for believing that the novel has become a form of self-indulgence, a drug which injects its readers with false easy emotions and an attitude to life based on the most meagre kind of experience. Besides this, it has become increasingly difficult for the serious novelist to live on what he earns by writing novels. This is not entirely because of the competition of the standardised type of fiction. The intense effort to grasp what, in 1937, is happening to human beings—in the world outside them and in their own minds and hearts—demands time, willingness to travel, mentally if not physically, until you come to the place where a new life is being born. None of this is easy. If it means success of one kind it may mean failure in another. Failure, poverty, and what is worse, not being heard. I am not now talking about genius—though genius itself can be killed or at least deformed by being born at the

wrong time or the wrong place. A genius has no more brains than another man to be shot out of him. And no fewer needs. During the last ten years of his life D. H. Lawrence wrote too much and too quickly—he had his living to earn. But I am talking about the talented and intelligent writer who can take hold of the spirit of his age only by a persistent struggle with it. His inner sight has to be sharpened. He has to work hard for his vision. If the contemporary novel is to be saved and regenerated certain things are required of novelists—especially of the young ones. The rest of us are probably past hope.

How is the novelist to break through to the new reality, the new consciousness of reality? A discipline, a double discipline, is needed. He must make a willing and passionate surrender to experience—to the point of extinction of his personal life—so that he may become more sensitive, more susceptible to an always widening range of emotional experience. And he must practise an absolute faithfulness in turning emotion into words. The situation, the sequence of events, the characters, that are to carry the emotion must not be artificially blown out by pumping into them feelings which the novelist thinks ought to belong there.

Where is he to look for these events, these characters, if—for the reasons we have examined—he cannot attempt to get into a novel those anony-

mous masses, moved by almost inarticulate passions and desires, which, more than any individual, express the reality of the contemporary scene? (Unless it were a gigantic and legendary figure like Ulenspiegel, 'the great Beggar'.) He must thrust his knife to come in as near the bone of reality as he can. Birth, death, the relations of men and women, are part of the social complex at the same time as they are common and at home with us. When a writer examines the social complex he is revolted by a great many things. He is usually eager to say so, which is a mistake. He may, he *must* revolt against hypocrisy, worn-out conventions, injustice, cruelty. But if he is going to write about them as a novelist he should remember that his emotions are not interesting because he feels them. The more deeply he has felt, the harder he must work to detach himself. To present not himself—not his raw personal emotions and reflections, nor the images latent in his unconscious—but the thing observed.

We often speak as though novels were composed of characters and plot. What they are composed of is words. To regenerate the novel means regenerating the language. Here is a sentence by a serious and thoughtful modern novelist. 'He made even this mob of posh young men look gauche and uncouth, as though one saw a fragile, perfect statuette walking through a field of prize cattle.'

Now, without reading the whole book, that sentence is enough to warn us that the character described in these words is much less interesting and significant than the author wants to make us believe. The slovenly wording, and the use of a clumsy inexpressive metaphor, are sufficient evidence that the writer's thoughts were confused and his feeling poor and thin. Alert and sensitive feelings would have warned him that a statuette walking through a field would look far more out of place—'gauche and uncouth'—than the cattle. If we are going to have a new attitude to life we need to look very carefully at the words we use. We need words that are things. And new and unexpected combinations of words to bring out the meaning—as sharply as it is brought out in a documentary film by the choice of significant detail and the angle from which the picture is made.

A passage in a new novel—*The World Ends*, by William Lamb—says much of what I want to say. {The only salvation for literature is to go back to the beginning.} No descriptions of scenery—except when it is necessary to explain that there was no water in the hills and the men were dropping off from thirst, or that in the pass one machine-gun could hold up all the troops a murderous government was able to send. Or you may say that the sea was cruel or as cold as ice—or that a girl's eyes are "like the eyes of a kitten." But that's all.

The stories themselves must be honest passionate accounts of a man's conflict with danger, cruelty, injustice, and the earth itself. Nothing else is worth discovering. Nothing else matters. I don't want to read one more novel in which the characters wallow in money and false emotions—wax models—commonplace sentimental young women imagining themselves ironical—or in which everything real is sacrificed to the “brilliant atmosphere”, or smothered in “charming descriptions of the country Mr. Spatterdash knows so well, etc.” They make me ashamed. I want to tear off atmosphere and all the rest of it, like pulling the clothes off a sick man to see what's the matter with him.'

There are no short cuts to the regeneration of a language. No tricks are any use. Here is a quotation from another recent novel. The writer is trying to convey a man's disturbed state of mind.

' . . . walking towards the library he was thinking
glad
sad
glad
sad
glad
sad glad sad glad sad glad glad sad glad sad glad
sad glad sad glad sad gladsadgladsadgladsadgladsad
gladsad, without truly finding out which he was.'

This method is completely indefensible. You might say that it is the pointillist method of painting

applied to writing. But pointillism in painting depends on depths of light, and on the placing and composing of colours and forms. There are in writing no *visual* depths, and in writing of this sort there are no aural depths either. It is possible to produce an effect of depth by merely aural means—by the arrangement of vowel sounds. But this makes sound the determining factor in writing, a thing not defensible in prose. Sound cannot be the determining cause in poetry, either: a poet's words are given to him at some level of his consciousness on which the sound is itself determined by the emotion.

New senses, a new conception of life, new feelings, demand a perpetual search for words and phrases not rubbed thin by misuse or vulgarised by advertisement-writers. We need a literature in closer touch with the language of non-literary activities. When the wife of an unemployed seaman says to me: 'By Thursday I'm ashore for food', she is using an image as vivid, as living, as any in Shakespeare. We need to find these images. If we cannot regenerate the novel—because the task is impossible or too difficult for us—we can keep the language alive for the novelist to whom it will be natural to think in a new way. In the meantime only those novelists are worth troubling about who are trying to become more aware of what is happening to us. Trying to convey their know-

ledge with the greatest possible exactness and emotional relevance. Trying, as Lawrence said, 'to lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness.' The others are dead, and it seems a pity that they are not buried.

1937.

I shall not say anything about this.

Fragment of an (Unwritten) Autobiography

I NEVER wanted to write.

This is partly true. From one cause and another—but chiefly because I had a hard time to get myself to a university—I didn't, when I was very young, think of writing. Once only, when I was at school, it had occurred to me that I might become a poet. I wrote about two hundred lines of a long poem in the metre of *Hyperion*. I can remember nothing about it except that the last word was '*Renunciation*.' After that, I suppose, it became too difficult. About ten years ago I found a fair copy of it in a drawer and destroyed it.

At the university I wrote a thesis on Blake: about eighty thousand words. Most of it was written during the summer vacation in Leeds, in the admirable public library which contained, beside books on Blake, Ellis and Yeats's large edition of the *Works*. I remember that it was a very hot summer. In the last week of the vacation I made a fair copy of it at home, in Whitby, writing all night the last two nights. My mother understood

so well the need for this forced march that she got me green tea, with which I kept myself awake.

As I remember it, that thesis was abominably written, in immense involved sentences. I had no notion how to write.

I kept this, my first 'work', for several years. The typescript was read by a few persons besides the university authorities. J. G. Wilson the bookseller was one of these, and it is in my mind that he showed it to a publisher. He had—has—an enthusiastic kindness for young writers. The original copy, corrected and interlined, lived in the corner of a shelf in the dining-room of my first house, exactly behind the coalbox. It became terribly dusty. When did I destroy it and the typed copy? *Did* I destroy them, or were they lost somewhere? I have no recollection. Certainly they vanished years ago.

My ambition during this time was to be a don. I worked and hoped for this. But in the end, when I had taken a very good degree, no encouragement was forthcoming from the only quarter where it could come from. At the time I put this down to my being a young woman, but doubtless there were other very good reasons, not obvious to me. I would not allow myself to feel disappointed, or even to think about it. I took the research scholarship offered to me and wrote another thesis—on modern European drama this time. I don't know

whether anyone told me to write in short sentences this time. I am inclined to think I came to it myself—the first time my mind took a step on its own.

In April, 1914, I was living in Kettering. My book on drama had been packed off to the university and I knew I should be rewarded for it with—another degree. It was meagre comfort for the moment. I saw no future for myself and my hopes. Not that I admitted to myself even now that I had been passed over by the authorities who might have noticed me. My mind ignored all that. It behaved like a newly-trapped wild animal. A furious undirected energy possessed it. Looking back, I see myself as a harmless young fool. But I daresay I was an intolerably restless companion. I did not know what to do or which way to turn to escape. I hated Kettering, and quoted with pleasure a line (of Belloc's?) about the Midlands being 'sodden and unkind'.

It was unjust. This spring, the last of the old world, the hawthorn was the finest I ever saw it; the hedges were an unbroken wave of white blossom, miraculous.

Since there was nothing else I could do I began to write a novel. With my first sight of Kettering I had made a vow not to stay there a day longer than I must. I refused to look for a house to live in. Even then I had an instinctive horror of

possessions—an instinct I have ignored to my cost. So, we lived in a small commercial hotel. No one else *lived* in it. No one except me would have dreamed of doing so. We had a dingy small sitting-room of our own. I had a perpetual grudge against the landlady for mixing potato peelings with the coal she allowed me. I suppose she did it to damp down the fire, but the smell was insidious and abominable. I daren't complain. We paid so little, and we had with difficulty persuaded her to take us.

With my large ideas of what is barely necessary for living on a salary of less than fifty shillings a week, I took out a subscription to the Times Book Club. I had time, during the long days, for plenty of reading and, as well, for the first time I could read without a thesis in view. Everything I read stirred a little the ferment in my mind. Novels scarcely interested me. I got out one after another the volumes of J. A. Symonds's *History of the Renaissance in Italy* and lived in it with an indescribable excitement and pleasure. What value the book has as a work of scholarship I don't know, but I owe it a debt I shall never pay in my turn. If at this minute some young shabby girl, baffled by her life, is recovering it in a book, it is little likely to be one of mine.

With so much reading, and with days when I was too restless to read, let alone write, my first

novel went slowly. I try to remember the mood in which I began it. What did I think to do? Certainly I was not interested in telling a story. Nor, very much, in characters. A large exercise book survives (because it is still in use) from this time, and contains two and a half pages of scattered notes I made for it. They follow no plan. Most of them are now meaningless. What can one make of this? 'A Lucretian millionaire, exploiting men and their atoms.' Or this? 'Progress. Karl Marx. Fabians. Mrs. Webb to tea. Cloven hoof.' Three incidents are noted in a few lines, and there are even briefer ideas for characters. I notice an odd thing about these. They are none of them men and women so much as embodied ideas. A number of the notes concern the ideas that possessed me then, in 1914. 'Coming struggle. Back to caste tradition. Chaos instead of order. No roots (even reformers have no roots).'

Nothing would induce me to open the novel itself, to see how many of these lightly scrawled notes took form in it. What is clear is that Nature felt no more eager to make a novelist of me than the university authorities to make me a don. No plot, only disjointed scenes. No characters, only dry bones in the valley of my mind—the *ideas* collected in years of ill-directed reading, borrowed from the *New Age*, remembered from students' talk. There is a single exception to make to this.

One breath of life blew into the manuscript from heaven knows where. For one moment my mind shook off its preoccupation with other people's thoughts, and made an irresponsible gesture towards freedom. I'll remember this later.

The War broke out. I moved to Liverpool, and the trap I had been evading closed on me. I took a house and became its servant. I never do anything by halves. Hating domesticity I was a far more efficient housewife than any I have been able to employ. I can't write or read in an untidy room. The second half of my novel was written in the intervals of scrubbing, cooking, washing up, shopping. It was still not finished when my son was born in the middle of 1915, in Whitby.

After this it gathered dust in a corner of the shelf for five months. In December I went to Whitby again with my baby—and my manuscript, pushed into our suitcase at the last minute. I should have time there, I thought, to write. The War was killing my friends and making everything uncertain, but my mind and body were too young not to think of the future with hope for myself.

*'My Spectre around me night and day,
Like a Wild beast guards my way. . . .'*

My Spectre was a mind, ambitions, that gave me no rest.

In Whitby my six-months'-old son caught whooping-cough from my sister. He took it mildly, but he woke up and coughed at night. I burned vapo-cresolene in our room, over a night-light. One night I was kneeling on the floor, resting my paper on the edge of a chair in the feeble tiny ring of light round the night-light. Part of my mind was at the door of my ear, listening for the first sign of restlessness from the cot. Suddenly a person, imagined and real, broke into my mind like a thief. A disreputable little man, with a round bristling face, called Poskett. At first sight I knew all about him. I knew he had had trouble with his wife—and no wonder. I knew his weaknesses, his shocking habits, his one endearing virtue. I crouched, scribbling like a maniac, foolishly smiling. My cheeks burned. The child in the cot woke up, coughed and was sick: I made him comfortable and went back to Poskett, who, for that matter, had never been out of my thoughts. I wrote until stiffness in my knees, cramp in my wrist, and the cold, drove me shivering into bed.

Only a fraction of what at that time I knew about him went into the book. It never occurred to me that this fraction was the only touch of reality in the whole preposterous thing. No one told me so. I don't think a reviewer noticed him. A pity.

I didn't finish the book during this time. But I wrote some verses for it on the lasting passion of my life (Whitby). One evening the electric light flickered out and on three times, and finally stayed out, which was the signal for the Zeppelins. In the darkness, I found a piece of paper and sat on the floor with my back against the leg of the table, to catch a little light from the candle my Mother set near her chair. The 'poem' was finished just when the light came on again, and I read it to my Mother. She admired it very much. Exhilarated, I said: 'The poetess will now get supper ready.' 'Poetess indeed,' she said kindly. I half thought I was one.

I finished the novel some time during 1916. I don't remember much about this time, except that I was always too busy and often now too tired to write. I used to think about it sometimes when I was wheeling my son out. Inside the front cover of the exercise book I wrote down phrases that occurred to me. I had begun to do this in Kettering. I don't think many came to me now. It was finished at last, and I made a typed copy of it, working away with two fingers on a rickety machine we had scrounged. This took a good time.

When I left Liverpool for good in the spring of 1917 the typescript went with me. It had already been rejected by one publisher—Duck-

worth, I think. From Reading I posted it to another. For the time being I wrote nothing more. Novel-writing really did not interest me much. I waited to see what would happen to this one.

Mr. Fisher Unwin sent for me to go and see him. I made outwardly calm inwardly nervous preparations for the interview. I saw his Reader first, who talked to me very kindly. Did he tell me to throw this novel away? I don't think so. He couldn't have realised how impenetrable my self-confidence was to kindness. Then I saw Mr. Unwin himself, in one of those lovely Adelphi rooms for which our latter-day barbarians have no use. After some talk he suggested that I might care to offer him, say, my next six novels. If he had said 'the next one', I might have agreed on a rather one-sided bargain, but the notion that I might go on writing novel after novel alarmed me, and I got up to go. Charminglly polite to an uncouth young woman, he accompanied me to the door and put in my hand a copy of *The Way of an Eagle*.

'I'll give you this,' he said kindly. 'Read it, and see how a novel ought to be written.'

The manuscript—I left with it under my arm—went somewhere else. Where? I have forgotten. It came back. I sent it out again, from a Hampshire village this time, to Constable.

Surely I must have kept, at least for some

months or years, the letter Constable wrote saying that they were interested in it and would like to see the author. It has vanished now. With the self-doubt which lies deeper in me than my confidence—but not deeper than a blind obstinacy—I didn't assume that they were willing to publish the book. I wrote and asked them if that was what they meant. If it was not, I didn't mean to spend train fare on another journey, and perhaps be given a copy of another best-seller to study.

Their answer still left a faint doubt in my mind. I imagined, too, that when they knew that the author was a young woman they would think less of the book. I sent my husband up to interview them, and to pose as Storm Jameson. I might just as well have gone myself. The junior partner in the firm was a young man called Michael Sadleir. He easily persuaded the truth out of the other young man. I suppose I was pleased when I knew certainly that my book was going to be published. I have forgotten. But I am sure I took it coolly. I never give myself away. Nor expect much good. But I must, for a time, have felt a little safer.

My memory, that japer, has kept a small distinct picture of myself crossing the sitting-room of Michael Sadleir's London house. In the picture the room is a mile long and to all intents and purposes I cross it on my hands and knees. After dinner I went through the manuscript and drew

my pencil through passages he said were silly and must come out. My half-realised contempt for novel-writing made this easy to do. He knocked four words off the title. I had called it *The Pot Boils and the Scum Rises*.

Some weeks later, after the contract was signed, I had pressing need of money. There was nothing new about this state of things, but I had a new idea for dealing with it. I wrote to Constable and asked them for a little money. I had a dim notion that this was an outrage. But, I said to myself, they have got my book, which is worth something. I was far from supposing that it was less an asset to the firm than a liability.

Anybody who believes that publishers—except one or two perhaps—are not gentle-hearted good men must drop his head for shame. They sent me ten pounds. It meant, of course, that their losses were ten pounds heavier than they would have been.

The novel was published early in 1919. Trying to feel my way back to what must have been a time, however short, of excitement and expectancy, I can recall nothing. Nothing at all of the feelings of an obscure young woman. I remember that I saw no one during the early days whom I could speak to about it. I don't suppose I minded that. It wouldn't have suited me to show much interest, or to be eyed.

In my ignorance I was not surprised that it had a great many reviews. I don't think it was much praised, but it was taken seriously. On Michael Sadleir's advice I had sent a guinea to a press-cutting agency. I kept every review, bad and good; and kept them for a long time, too. Four or five years. But I destroy everything in time—letters, reviews, all that. Nowadays I get rid of them very quickly—at once. I won't leave a wrack of papers behind when I die. I want, when I die, to clear off without a trace. *Spurlos versenkt*. Nor do I care to drag about with me while I am alive a growing burden of documents from my past. Go, go, I say, tearing up letters the moment I have answered them, tearing up my notes for a book, rejecting mementoes, rubbing out where I can every mark of myself on this earth I shall leave with such bitter anguish.

I should like to be able to destroy every copy of *The Pot Boils*, wherever it is. It is, I'm happy to know, not in the ordinary way to be bought. The copyright is mine, too, and it can never be reprinted, even if there were a competition for Worst Novels. It was an unbelievably bad book, though perhaps not the worst I have written. Its singular badness proves that I was not a born novelist, but I think it has another lesson for the young writer—and that is the importance he should attach to being born into a literary or literary-

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overcrowded to a degree that he is lucky if he is not suffocated in the first few minutes. If he is noticed he can hope for thoughtful useful criticism from, at most, two or three quarters. The rest will be no use to him. The weekly reviews will not notice him at all, unless he has laid his lines beforehand to bring them in.

The undeniable overcrowding is most serious for an unfriended writer. His best hope is to make friends in the right places quickly. This if he is sensitive is a waste of energy and spirit, but it may—I don't say that it will—save him from wasting his time working with care and passion at a novel only to hear a few careless words thrown after it as it sinks for the last time. A society on the point of dying of its vulgarity is no nursery for a young serious writer. In this sense, as in some others, his lot is harder than mine was in 1919. For money it could scarcely be harder. Ten pounds for more than three years' work. And that not earned.

I regret still that I did not become a don.

Postscript.

The few, the very few, documents I do not destroy include the contracts for my books. I have them all, neatly clipped with a rubber band. A minute ago I had the curiosity to look in the envelope marked 'Constable. *The Pot Boils*'. I

have found a paper which would certainly have been destroyed if it had not hidden itself there all these years—the Report of Duckworth’s anonymous reader on the book. I wonder how I came by it. Did I ask them for it? I was innocent enough to have done that.

He wrote: ‘This is a distinctly clever tract, gibing at the young intellectuals who “take up” social reform. It is not so much satire as irony, and it is a difficult book to place. Amid much cleverness and insight, there are streaks of self-conscious smartness and labouring of the point. Still, I think it is worth some attention.

‘It is loosely constructed; starts nowhere; ends nowhere; tries apparently to follow the French mode of throwing in jabs of light on a given situation from many angles. Each chapter introduces new characters, who reappear at odd moments; and the characters are so many and so ill-defined that the reader becomes confused in sorting them out. They do not live; they are just vehicles for the author’s theories and the expounding of his theme.

‘There is no plot. The book just rambles round the thoughts, ideals and struggles of a group of young people from a northern university; their dissatisfaction with life as it is; their forlorn miseries over things that don’t matter.

‘I think it should be considered, though hardly

for immediate publication. If this is a first book, it shows considerable promise, and the author would in any case I think be worth encouraging for his next book. There would hardly be much in this book, but the man can write and is worth watching.'

'The man' could *not* write. Being denied other uses for his mind he fell into the habit of writing. A pity.

September 1938.

